

GRANDMA'S TALES

Lakshminath Bezbaroa



Translated by : Pallavi Barua

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GRANDMA'S TALES : is the English version of *Burhi-aair Sadhu*, a collection of Assamese Folktales compiled by Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbarua.

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A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

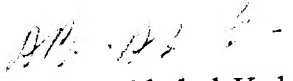
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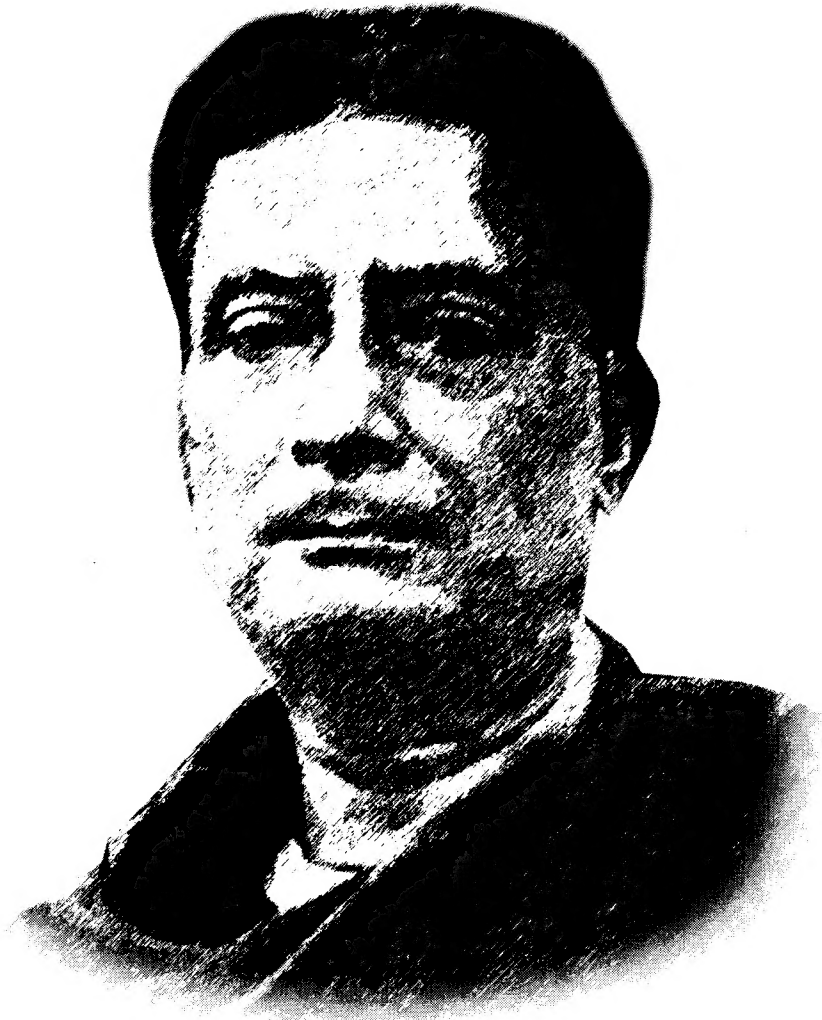
Dear Pallavi,

Thank you for sending me your English translation of Shri Lakshminath Bezbaroa's famous collection of Assamese folk tales. They carry a distinctive flavour of the Northeast and its people who stay close to nature in these areas. Tales like 'The Sly Fox' is indeed well translated and edited.

My best wishes for your efforts.


(A.P.J. Abdul Kalam)

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ASSAM.



'Rasaraj' Lakshminath Bezbaroa
(1868-1938)

INTRODUCTION

As every nation and so to say, every country has a distinct language, so also it has a distinct folklore. Just like language as a means of expression sprouted up from the roots of national life, folklore has also been a form of revelation and characterisation of national life since the ancient past. All the people, the learned and the laity, the elite and the commons comprising a nation leave their imprints on their language. Similarly, all classes of people in a nation leave an indelible mark of age-old practice and usage, habits and customs as also of thought and imagination in the folk-tales. Therefore, just as philology and mythology are the pre-requisites necessary to trace out the unwritten history of the national life of man, folk-lore is also equally essential for the purpose.

Bopp, the renowned German philologist asserted that the Teutons, the Celts, the Hindus and all other Aryan races were originally the same, that their roots lay in the same family of the Central Asia and that they are the branches of a single tree. This theory has since been confirmed by analysis and comparison of the themes contained in the folk-tales.

Till a long time ago, people considered folk-tales to be childish and trifling as they did not know their intrinsic value. But the German scholars were the first to contradict this wrong concept. Initially, the true value of folk-tales was determined in Germany and the tales were studied in a scientific manner. This endeavour was first made in the famous book "Collection of Popular Songs" by Herder, which was published in 1778-79 A.D. But this endeavour bore mature fruits only after the great effort of the famous scholar Grimm during the period starting from 1811 to 1835 A.D. The folk-tales gained currency among the people through oral transmission from one generation to another. But the scholars collected them for record from the old women in Germany who used to work as paid weavers. In reality, it was due to the efforts of the German scholars that the modern civilized world has been made aware of the fact that, the basis of the folk-tale of a nation and the origin of a word in a language are more valuable than the history of a great war.

Basically, there are two categories of folk-tales, one is primarily meant to impart moral lessons like the "Panchatantra", the "Hitupadesha" and the tales composed by La Fontaine. The other category comprises the tales which are an outcome of wild imagination for providing amusement to

the young and the old alike ---- especially the children. But, whatever might be the purpose behind the origin of folk-tales, scholars have now been able to extract the essence of ancient history of the human race from them which has enriched the sphere of human knowledge. The aim of this preface however is not to discuss the matter any further within its narrow ambit. The readers may observe that the central theme in this book are to be found in the tales of other provinces of India, especially those of Bengal. But it would be wrong to assume that these are composed after the model of tales of other provinces. There are many reasons behind the similarity of folk-tales of one province or country with those of another. Among them, the first is that the tales were composed during the time when the ancient Aryans lived together. In the course of time, as the Aryans migrated to different parts of Europe and Asia, there were changes in their nature and disposition conforming to the changed environment, situation and circumstances. Similarly, changes have also taken place in the folk-tales. But the basic structure of the tales has not changed nor will change. As such, even though the outer form of the numerous Indo-European folk-tales might be different, the foundation remained the same. So, when the readers of the "Panchatantra" and the "Hitupadesha" happen to read the tales of La Fontaine, they do not feel unfamiliar to him. Therefore, when the tales told by the nurses in India while comforting children resemble those told by the German, the Norwegian and the French nurses, one finds no basic difference in them except in matters of language and set-up.

Again, sometimes it is seen that folk-tales of a country get orally migrated to some other country. Some outer changes are inevitable in them during this process. As a result of wide circulation for a considerable time in a neighbouring country, a tale loses its original form and adopts a local texture. But such tales are few in number. It is also natural for the local folk-tales to find an easy access into a neighbouring country. As such, we find many Asamese folk-tales prevalent in North Bengal. It will be pertinent to keep in mind that since certain parts of East and North Bengal were included in the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa, many of Assamese folk-tales have become a part of Bengali folklore. Now-a-days we find Bengali writers publishing folk-tales as "*Rupkatha*". If we carefully observe the writings, it will be clearly seen that the influence of Assamese folk-tales is traceable more in the books of the writers from North- Bengal than in those of the writers of West Bengal. This can be proved by reference to two books on folktales viz., "Tuntunir Boi", authored in North Bengal and "Thakurmar Jhuli", authored in West Bengal.

There is another reason behind the similarity among folk-tales of

different countries. It is termed as co-incidental similarity. All human-beings in a way are the same everywhere. The mode of thinking on various aspects is the same among them. As such, even certain tales of the Hottentots or of the Zulus have similarity with those of the Aryans.

The Assamese are aware of the value of folk-tales since the ancient past and they have always held them in high esteem. This trait is evident from the word "*Sadhu-Katha*", which means tales of virtue or sayings of the wise. Thus it can be easily understood that in Assam these gratifying tales were narrated by the wise to the common masses and to their children. Since time immemorial they are therefore called "*Sadhu-Katha*". No nation of any other country has given such tales or stories a name as glorifying as this. Unlike the Asamese, the Europeans term them as "Folktales", the Bengalis call them "*Rupkatha*" or "*Ashareh Golpo*". Language and folk-tales are the bone and marrow of a nation. The Asamese call their language as "Mother" and folk-tales as "*Sadhu-Katha*"; in spite of that it is said that the languages --- Asamese and Bengali --- are the same.

Finally, I would like to mention that we received many tales incorporated in this book from the persons mentioned below. But, it is not feasible for us to point out which tale was contributed by whom. It is because we received identical tales written in different styles of composition from several persons. The tales were compared, made additions and alterations in them and then selected after careful perusal. In reality, it may be mentioned that the language in which they wrote the tales to us is literally not there. One may incidentally come across an original sentence or two in certain tales. Some of the tales of course are completely ours. Be it whatever it is, we are grateful to them for their help. They are ---

Sree Bhramarchandra Saikia, Sree Moheechandra Bora, Sree Sitanath Sarma, Sree Sarbeswar Sarma Kotoky, Sree Rudrakanta Goswami, Sree Wajed Ali, Sree Naranath Sarma, Sree Raseswar Sarma, Sree Padmadhar Chaliha, Sree Ratnakanta Sarma, Sree Haladhar Bhuyan, Sree Golok Chandra Sarma, Sree Meghnath Deka, Sree Rupchandra Barua, Sree Dinanath Medhi, Sree Loknath Das, Sree Gobinda Chandra Choudhary, Sree Dineswar Dutta.

Lawrence,
Howrah,
Kaati, 1833 Saka, 1911 A.D.

Author
(**Lakshminath Bezbaroa**)

FOREWORD

I have read with great pleasure the manuscript-copy of Ms. Pallavi Barua's English Translation of "*Burhi-aair Sadhu*", a top-ranking Assamese Classic. "*Burhi-aair Sadhu*" is a collection of Assamese folk-tales compiled and edited by the brightest star of twentieth-century literary firmament of Assam, Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Translation of such a book is a challenging task and I must say that Pallavi has attained an impressive measure of success in her undertaking. The need of introducing this gem of Assamese folklore to the lovers of culture and literature, who are not familiar with the Assamese language was very much there, and as such, she has filled up a long-standing necessity. The very act of selecting "*Burhi-aair Sadhu*" for translation into English is a commendable choice. The translator is a very young college-student and her keen interest in Assamese literature deserves wide appreciation. I expect that she would pursue this task during the years to come through more such translations. True, the young translator has some shortcomings, but I am sure of the fact that she would overcome those shortcomings. My very best wishes to Pallavi.

Hirendra Nath Dutta
(Retd) Prof. of English,
Guwahati University.
[Recipient of the Sahitya
Academy Award 2005]

Guwahati,
12 November, 2005

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Assamese is one of the indigenous languages of North-East India. This language has since been made the official language of the state of Assam, the heart-land of the North-East. In spite of such literary tradition, the language is little known to the rest of the world. This is due to factors like geographical alination, communication bottle-neck and lack of exposure.

"Burhi-aair Sadhu", a compilation of age-old tales of Assam by Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the doyen of Modern Assamese Literature. Through the medium of the international language English, I have made a humble effort to bring out some folk-tales of this regional language to a greater number of readers. These folk-tales, though basically meant for children, form an integral part of the Assamese folklore. The stories are not to be taken to be literal translation of the original because some adaptations had to be made to fit into a foreign language. The meanings of the Assamese words which had to be retained even in the course of the translation have been given at the end of those stories where required.

I am indebted to my mother Smt. Juna Barua, and my father Dr. Siva Prosad Barua, who have always stood by me in all my endeavours. I would also like to thank my sister Pranami, whose sheer enthusiasm about my work has been a source of encouragement for me.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to Mr. Biren Barua, retd. Lecturer of English in the Tezpur College for consenting to undertake the strenuous task of proof-reading and taking all pains to correct the errors in composition made by me.

I express my heart-felt thanks to Mr. Pradeep Terang, an experienced artist, for his wonderful illustrations. I wouldn't have asked for more.

Before concluding my words, I express my sincere regards to eminent literateur Prof. Hirendra Nath Dutta, for looking into the script of the book and adoring it with a "Foreword" Note.

Guwahati - 781003,
15th November, 2005.

Translator
Pallavi Barua

A FEW WORDS FROM THE ILLUSTRATOR

A picture is an image saved in the mind's depth. When this is brought out in the form of an art, then it is converted to real pictures. The time and events happening around us is used as a symbol for this purpose.

"Burhi-aair Sadhu" is familiar to all in Assam. I have tried to create different characters present in the tales using different colours and costumes. I sincerely hope that the illustrations would make this book more interesting for its young readers.

I would like to thank Pallavi Barua, the translator of this Classic, for making me a part of her project, and for providing necessary guidance and suggestion in making the book more lively.

Guwahati,
8th November, 2005.

Illustrator
Pradeep Terang

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THE TALE OF THE CAT'S DAUGHTERS

A family had a pet cat. She was about to deliver kittens. At the same time, the lady of the house too was pregnant. As the cat wanted to eat fish, she said to the mistress, "I have a great desire to eat fish. The mistress replied, "My sweet girl, how can I give you fish to eat unless you bring it?" Hearing this, from that day onwards, the cat used to bring fish from other people's house, by stealing or by force. On the other hand, the mistress used to cook and eat the fish and, the fish-bones were given to the cat. In this way, she was deprived of the fish which she collected every day. At this, she felt very hurt and cursed the mistress, "Whatever my womb is bearing, let it go to her and whatever her womb is bearing, let it come to me."



Both the cat and the lady of the house were pregnant.

Truly ! After a few days, the mistress gave birth to two kittens while the cat gave birth to two baby-girls. The cat somehow managed to bring up the two girls with affection. Leaving the girls behind, she used to go out in search of fish, milk and other eatables. As the two girls grew up, they became concerned and one day said to the cat, "Mother, if someone kills you while going to the village, how would we come to know and what should we do?" Then, the cat planted a basil sapling and placed a round earthen-vessel containing milk and said, "If someone kills me, then this plant will wither and the milk in the vessel will turn black. Then you go out in search of me". A few days later, the plant withered and the milk in the vessel turned black. Knowing what must have taken place, they went out in search of their mother. They came quite a distance when the younger of the two felt thirsty. While searching for water, they reached a river.



While searching for water, the two sisters reached a river.

Leaving her sister on the bank, the elder one descended to bring water. After quenching her thirst, she was about to collect water for her younger sister. As she was doing so, the water dried up and the prince of the river said, "If you hand over your ring to me, then only you can take some water". Compared to her sister, the ring was of no value. So, she gave the ring in return for some water. After drinking water, the younger sister sent the elder one to bring back the ring. This time, as soon as the elder sister descended to the river, the prince of the river took her away. When she saw her sister being taken away, the younger one sat on the bank and cried aloud. After some time, a merchant was coming along the river. On seeing the beautiful girl sitting alone on the bank, he took her away in his boat.



The younger sister sat on the bank and cried aloud

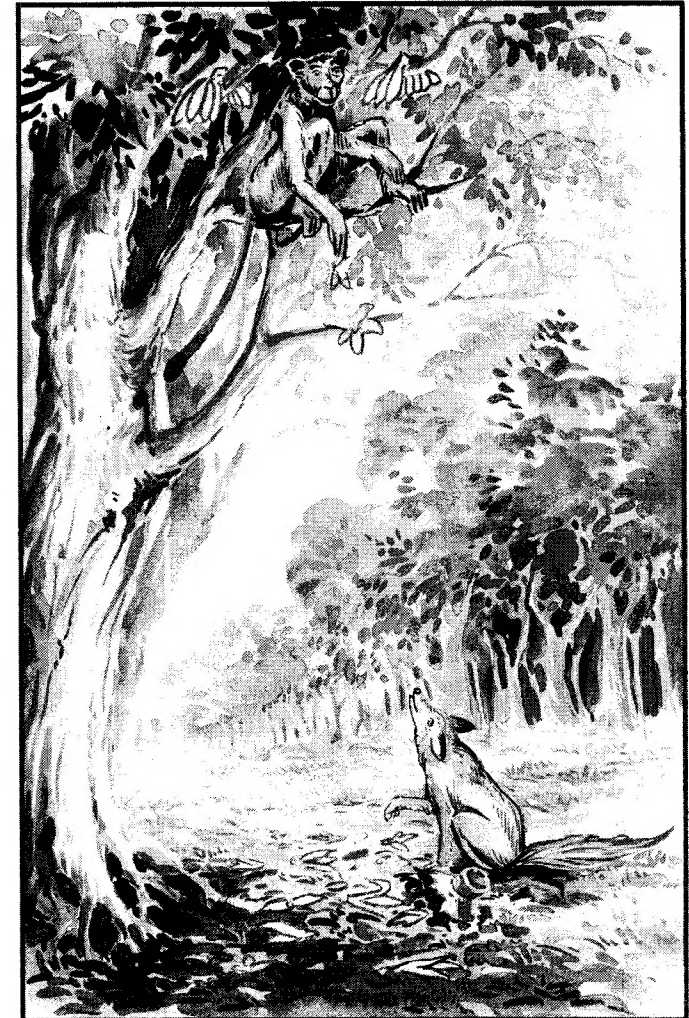
When he reached home, he accorded her the status of his third wife. The merchant showered more affection on his newly-wed tender-aged wife than on his other two wives. Out of jealousy, the two older wives began to think of ways to make their husband hate his third wife. On the ceremonial function occasioned by the birth of the third wife's first child, the other two blindfolded her saying that she begot a pestle and floated the new-born male child on the river. Next time too, in the same way, they lied to her that she begot a pumpkin and made the male baby to drift along the river. On the other hand, when the elder sister who was carried away by the river-prince came to know that the babies belonged to her younger sister, she adopted them and brought them up. The merchant thought these incidents of birth to be true and considered the youngest wife to be a cursed woman. He drove her out of his house and built a house for her in the backyard. She used to stay in that house in sorrow. One day when the merchant was venturing out on business, the river-prince seized of his boat in the mid-stream. The merchant was

unable to free the boat by any means. As he was perplexed thinking what to do, someone said from the water, "If you want your boat to be released, fix a date to hold a religious function and leave here your handkerchief and walking-stick." Finding no alternative, the merchant fixed a date to hold a community worship of Lord Vishnu, and dropped his handkerchief and walking-stick. As soon as he did so, the boat was freed.

On the other hand, the aunt narrated to the boys the incidents right from the birth of their mother from a cat's womb to their desertion in the river. She told them to relate the story of their life to the people assembled in the religious function held by their father. On the day of the function, the boys set out to the merchant's house along with the walking-stick and the handkerchief. At first, they went to their mother and addressing her as 'mother', asked for water to drink. At this, she thought them to be joking and said to them, "Why are you mocking at me? People are coming to the function, go and eat whatever you find there." Then, the two boys told everything in detail to their mother and introduced themselves to her. After taking rest for some time, they went to the religious function. A lot of people assembled to attend the function. By this time, news broke out that two persons who had entered into the house of the woman in the backyard, were present in the function. When this news came to be known to the people, they cried out that the persons should come out and introduce themselves to them. As soon as they heard them, the two brothers stood up together and said, "Our mother resides in the place where we went". When they asked the merchant about this, he couldn't say anything. At this, the people asked the boys to explain the matter. The elder one asked the people to listen attentively. Then he related everything in detail and showed the merchant's handkerchief and walking-stick to the people as proof of his statement. The merchant sighed in grief and confessed that both the walking-stick and the handkerchief belonged to him. Then, all of them understood the conspiracy of the other two wives of the merchant. When the wives were brought to answer to the allegations against them, they remained silent. The people didn't create any furor. After participating in the ceremony, they left. When the function was over, the merchant chopped off the nose and the ears of his evil wives and drove them out. He brought his two sons and his youngest wife home, and continued to live in peace and happiness.

THE MONKEY AND THE FOX

There were once a fox and a monkey. In the hope of living together, the two became friends. One day, they were hiding beside a road in the forest thinking what they would procure to eat. Just then, a few persons carrying milk, molasses, banana, sugarcane etc came along the way. Seeing that, the fox said to the monkey, "Friend, we should try to eat the things carried by these persons. So, let us think out a plan. You go and hide in a bush beside the road at a distance while I will hide in a bush nearby. As they come near



"Look friend, catch the banana that is going down."

us, I shall howl and you will chatter and whoop. You will see that they would run away scared by our cries."

After making this plan, the monkey and the fox went into hiding. When the persons came near, they heard their fearful sound and taking it to be that of some ferocious beast, ran away leaving the food-stuff behind them. As the men ran away, the fox and the monkey took the food-stuff into the forest. The monkey said to the fox, "Friend, if the men return for the food-stuff while we are eating here, they would beat us black and blue, and snatch away all the things. So, let us do one thing. I shall carry the food-stuff and climb on the tree. As you don't know how to climb, you will stay below. I shall eat my share up there and then drop your share of food from above. So, please lift the things up, I will carry them to the top." The fox agreed to this and started lifting the things for the monkey to carry to the top of the tree.

After storing all the eatables on a branch of the tree, the monkey started relishing them. The fox called from the ground, "Where is my share, friend?" Throwing the peel after partaking of the banana, the monkey said, "Look friend, catch the banana that is going down." After gulping the milk, he threw the empty vessel down and said, "Friend, here's your share of milk." On seeing the trick played by the monkey, the fox bit the foot of the tree and scratched the ground in anger before leaving the place with a heavy heart.

One day, seeing the fox sit near wasp's nest, the monkey came closer and asked, "Friend, what are you doing here?" The fox replied, "What to say, O friend? The king has appointed me as the guard of this large drum. So, I am sitting here near it. The monkey said, "Please let me play on the drum." The fox replied, "I can't allow you my friend. If the king hears, he will behead me. Can't you hear the sound it is making already?" The monkey said, "Please friend, let me give only a gentle tap. The king would not hear. I have a great desire to play on the drum." The fox said, "Let it be then, friend. How can I refuse you? Give a light tap." Saying this, the cunning fox left the spot in a jiffy. That was because the 'drum' contained a colony of wasps! As the monkey beat the drum in elation, all the wasps came out and attacked him. In no time, he had a swollen body. The monkey howled and cried out for the fox, "O friend, please come to my

help." The fox replied from a distance, "I have done a favour to you for throwing at me the peels after eating the bananas." The monkey cried out, "Friend, save me! I am dying." The fox replied, "I have taken revenge for throwing the empty vessel after consuming the milk." The monkey cried out, "O friend, please come. I will die." The fox replied, "It is a retaliation for throwing at me the chewed sugarcane." Leaving the monkey alone, the fox left the place.

After quite a long time, the monkey saw the fox near a cluster of wild arum. By then, the monkey forgot the incident of the wasps. Coming near to the fox, he asked, "Friend, what are you doing? What are these?" The fox smiled at the monkey and said, "These are the king's sugarcane. He has appointed me to stand guard here. What to do? The king's order must be obeyed." At sight of the sugarcane, the monkey's mouth began to water. The monkey said, "Friend, will you give me a small one to eat?" The fox replied, "What do you say? How can I give you to eat the king's sugarcane? If the king comes to know, he will not only kill me but my unborn baby too." Again, the monkey said, "No friend, I have a great desire to eat. Give me one to eat in secret. The king would not know." The fox said, "You may eat if you want to, whatever may happen will happen to me for that. But mind you, not more than one." No sooner had he got the permission, than greedy monkey fetched a large arum-plant and started chewing it. The plant caused severe itching sensation in the mouth of the monkey instantly. He began to shout and called out for the fox, "Friend, save me! I will die". The fox replied, "I am reciprocating the favour you did to me by throwing the peels at me after eating the bananas." The monkey cried, "Friend, I am dying." The fox replied, "I have taken the revenge for throwing at me the chewed sugarcane." The fox cried out, "Friend, save me! I will die." The fox said, "I have retaliated for throwing the empty vessel at me after relishing the milk." And the fox left the place.

Months after this incident, while roaming about, the monkey saw the fox sitting near a pucca-well. The top of the well was covered by cob-webs. The monkey completely forgot about the earlier incidents and asked the fox, "Friend, what are you doing?" The fox replied, "O friend! What am I to say? One or the other of the king's orders is always imposed upon me. This



"Will it not be a great pleasure to ride on the king's palanquin?"

'palanquin' belongs to the king. It was brought by his queen in dowry. I am guarding it." The monkey said, "Will it not be a great pleasure to ride on the king's palanquin? Let me see only for once how it feels to sit on it." The fox said, "I can't do that. If the king somehow finds a sign of someone else having sat on his 'palanquin', he will leave me jobless." The monkey said, "What trace will he find? Let me get on it slowly." The fox said, "If you are adamant and want to sit, then do so before anyone sees you." As soon as the monkey jumped onto the king's 'palanquin' in the hope of sitting on it, the cob-web gave way and he fell into the well and died of drowning.

OU - PRINCESS

A king had two queens. Both of them conceived. One day, both of them gave birth to their off-springs. The elder queen gave birth to a male baby and the younger queen begot a sour fruit called *ou-tenga*. The younger queen was very sad when she saw that her off- spring was merely a fruit and threw it away into the garbage pit. But it was seen that the fruit used to roll over and come to the queen whenever she was at work and when she was sleeping. Even when the queen used to throw it away, it used to



An exquisitely beautiful maiden emerged and bathed in the river.

roll back to be near her. One day, at noon, when there was no one around, the fruit rolled over to the bathing place on the river-side and stood there for some time. At that time, a prince was angling at a lonely spot near the bathing place. The prince noticed that out of the fruit, an exquisitely beautiful maiden emerged and bathed in the river. As she dried her lock of hair, her beauty brightened even the surroundings. Then, she entered into the fruit again and rolled back to her mother's home. Charmed by the maiden's beauty, the prince dropped the fishing-rod, went home and entered the solitary chamber to express displeasure. Failing to find the prince anywhere, the parents started to search for him. Finally, they found him asleep in the solitary chamber. When they asked him the reason behind his sullen displeasure, the prince said, "At a certain king's house, there is a rolling *ou-tenga*. I want to marry the fruit." At first, the king and the queen tried to make the prince understand that it was a ridiculous and impossible thing. But the prince was adamant. Unable to put an end to the contention, the king sent a marriage proposal for the *ou-tenga* through a message to the *ou-princess's* father. On hearing about the proposal, the *ou-princess's* mother started to cry and said, "Why am I being put to shame in this way?" Finally, unable to refuse, she agreed and 'bathed' the fruit before giving it to the prince in marriage. The prince married it with display of great splendour and brought it home in a palanquin. The prince stayed with the fruit in the same bedroom. At night, when the mother of the prince sent him dinner, he partook a part of the food and left the rest. Then he went to bed. But when the prince was asleep, the girl came out of the fruit, ate the remnant of the dinner and again entered into it. Each morning when the prince used to wake up, he was surprised not to see the food left over by him at dinner. Unable to understand the reason behind, the prince used to sit cheerlessly. One day, an old beggar-woman came to the prince to ask for rice as alms. As she saw the prince sitting sad, she asked him, "Son, you are sitting sorrowfully. You have married but we have not seen the bride." Hearing the old woman, the prince told her everything in detail. At this, she said, "Son, your princess is inside the *ou-tenga*. In your bed-room, keep a fire of paddy-husk and a bowl containing a mixture of curd, milk and smashed banana.

You lie on your sleeping-mat and pretend as if you are in deep sleep. Thinking you to be asleep, as the girl ventures to come out of the fruit to have dinner, you get up immediately and throw it into the fire. But then, you will see that the girl faints and falls on the ground. You will hurriedly bring the mixture of curd, milk and banana from the bowl and apply it on her head. On doing so, she will regain her senses." At the old woman's advice, the prince was delighted and let her go with a reward. That night, acting according to the old woman's advice, he succeeded in gaining the *ou-princess*.



"Son, you are sitting sorrowfully."

The next morning, when the parents of the prince heard of the incident and saw their daughter-in-law, their hearts were filled with immense joy. When this news was sent to the *ou-princess's* parents, they too were delighted and solemnised the marriage-ceremony of their daughter again with great pomp and splendour.

Meaning :

Ou-tenga : a kind of acid fruit; elephant-apple.

THE RAVEN AND THE SPARROW

Once upon a time there lived a raven and a sparrow. Both of them became friends. One day, the two were sitting together on the branch of a tree. At about this time, they saw an old woman spreading out boiled paddy in her courtyard to dry. The raven said to the sparrow, "Friend, see ! That old woman has spread out boiled paddy in the sunshine. Let us collect some of it." The sparrow said, "Yes, let us do so." At this, the raven said, "But friend, why not make an agreement? If you cannot bring in your beak the same amount of paddy as I do, I shall eat you. And if I cannot bring in my beak the same amount of paddy as you do,



One day, the raven and the sparrow were sitting on a tree.

you shall eat me." On hearing the raven's words, the sparrow thought, " I can never bring in my beak the same amount of paddy that he can. As such, I understand, he has plans of eating me. Very well, let's see how he eats me." The raven said, "In that case, you go and pounce first to bring." The sparrow replied, "No friend, you go first." The raven said, "You should be the one to lead, I will only follow you." On hearing this, the sparrow brought a beakful of paddy in its small beak. But it was very little.

After that, the raven brought so much of paddy in its beak that it was many times more than what the sparrow had brought. No sooner had it brought paddy, than the raven said, "Friend, now I can eat you." The sparrow replied, "You can surely eat me. But before that, you must do one thing. As you always eat rotten things, your beak stinks. So, wash and cleanse your beak first" The raven said, "Alright friend. I will keep your word. I am going to wash my beak in the sea right now." Saying this, it flew and called out to the sea. The sea replied, "What happened?" The raven said –

"Give me water to wash my beak !

I will eat the sparrow."

The sea replied, "Where shall I give it? If you can bring a vessel, you may collect it."

On hearing the words, the raven went to the potter in search of a small earthen-jar. The raven called out to the potter –

"Give me a small earthen-jar to collect water from the sea to wash my beak."

The potter said, "I



The raven went to the potter in search of a small earthen-jar.

do not have a ready-made earthen-jar in my house. If you can bring me a little soil, I can make one for you."

On hearing the potter's words, the raven went near the soil and said—

"Give me soil, I will give it to the potter to make a small earthen-jar."

The soil replied, "How can I give it myself ? If by some means you can dig out, then take."

At this, the raven went to the buffalo and said—

"Give me your horn to dig the soil."

The buffalo answered, "How can I give you my horn? If you can take it by some means, you may."

On hearing the buffalo's words, the raven approached the dog and said to it—

"Kill the buffalo, I want the horn to dig the soil."



The raven went to the cow asking for milk.

The dog answered, "For many days till now, I have not taken milk. As such, I have lost my strength. If you can bring milk for me to drink, I can kill the buffalo."

The raven then went to the cow and said to her—

"Give me milk to feed the dog.

Let him gather strength to kill the buffalo."

The cow answered, "I have become old. I have not taken grass for many days. If you can bring me a lot of grass to eat, then I will give you as much milk as you want."

On hearing the reply of the cow, the raven went near the grass and said —

"Give mesome grass, I will feed the cow to give milk. I will feed the dog so that it gathers strength to kill the buffalo."

The grass replied, "How can I give you grass ? If you can cut it, you may take."

Hearing the words, the raven reached the smithy and called out to the blacksmith and said —

"Give me a sickle to cut grass, with which to feed the cow."

The blacksmith said, "My fire is extinguished. If you can bring me a little fire, I can make you a sickle right now."

On hearing the blacksmith's words, the raven looked about and saw smoke rising up at a distance. Just as he saw that, he flew and reached the place. He saw an old woman boiling paddy. The raven drew near the old woman and said to her, "Madam, can you give me a little fire." The old woman replied, " How will you carry it?" The raven said, "You tie it onto my wings." The old woman did so. The raven was flying over the sea with the bundle of burning charcoal tied to its wings . The burning charcoal came in contact with the wind and the wings caught fire. He fell into the sea and was drowned. On the other hand, the sparrow was following the raven secretly and saw what had happened. Finally, on seeing such an end of the raven, the sparrow was pleased and flew from the branch of a tree to that of another, and lived a carefree happy life.

A LADY-GARDENER AND A FLOWERING-PLANT

There was a lady-gardener. She planted a flowering-plant carefully. She used to take care of the plant daily but it didn't flower. Seeing this, she asked the plant —

"O plant, why don't you bloom ?"



"O plant, why don't you bloom?"

The plant answered —

"Why should I bloom if the cow
eats up my shoots ?"

Then the gardener went to the cow and asked ---

"O cow, why do you eat up the shoots
of the plant?"



"O cow, why do you eat up the shoots of the plant?"

The cow — "The cowherd doesn't graze me,
why shouldn't I eat ?"

The gardener — "O cowherd, why don't you graze the cow?"



"O cowherd, why don't you graze the cow?"

The cowherd – "The cook doesn't serve me food,
why should I graze the cow?"

The gardener – "O cook, why don't you serve the food?"



"O cook, why don't you serve the food?"

The cook– "The wood-cutter doesn't supply me with fire-wood,
why should I serve?"

The gardener – "O fuel-dealer, why don't you supply
fire-wood?"

The wood-cutter – "The blacksmith doesn't give me an axe,
why should I supply?"

The gardener – "O blacksmith, why don't you give an axe?"



"O balcksmith, why don't you give an axe?"

The blacksmith – "The coal-dealer doesn't provide me with coal, why should I give ?"

The gardener – "O coal-dealer, why don't you provide the coal?"

The coal-dealer – "If I should supply coal, why does the cloud rain?"

The gardener – "O cloud, why do you rain?"



"O cloud, why do you rain?"

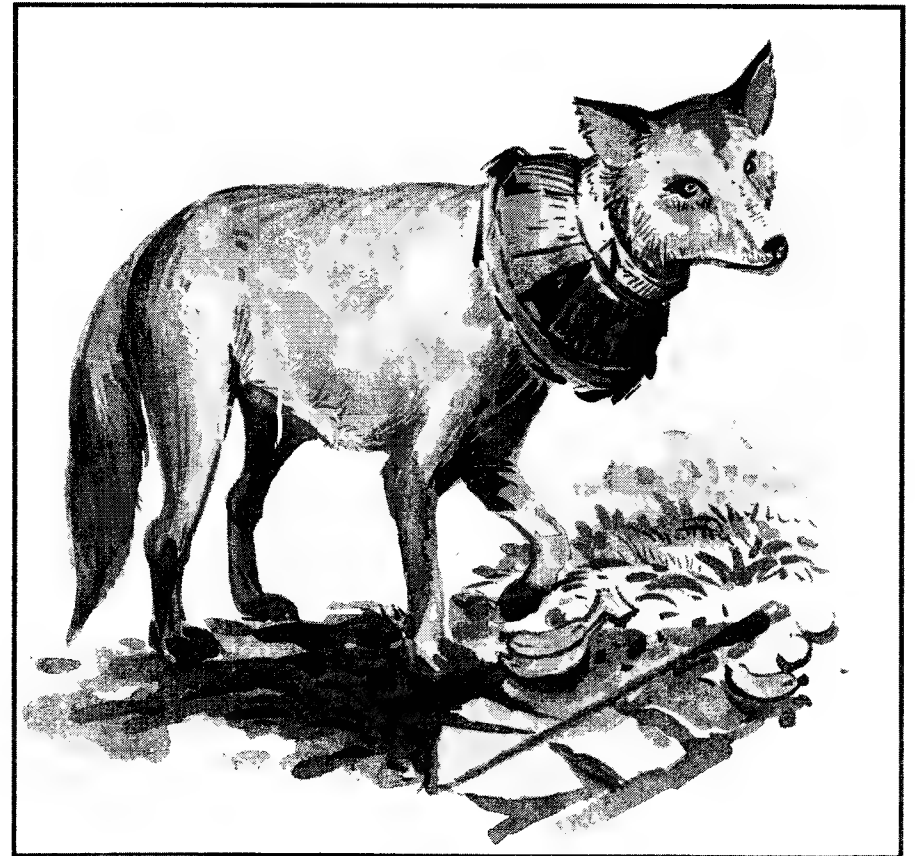
The cloud – "The frog croaks, why shouldn't I rain?"

The gardener – "O frog, why do you croak ?"

The frog – "Why should I leave the way of my ancestors?"

THE SLY FOX

One day, a hungry fox was roaming about stealthily in the gardens and houses of a village. About this time, he found a basket with a broken bottom on the high platform of the granary. It contained *pitha* (rice-cakes) which were kept as an offering to Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. He finished off the cakes and began to lick the banana-leaf which covered the cracked bottom of the broken basket. As he was licking the banana-leaf with all attention, it tore and the broken basket went through his head and reached the neck, forming a sort of 'necklace'. By no means, the fox could remove the basket from his neck. Finally, it so happened that the fox could not catch any duck or hen as, whenever he used to venture out unsteadily with the broken basket



By no means, the fox could remove the basket from his neck.

around his neck, people used to cry out, "Catch the necklaced", and ran after him to drive him away.

One day, while the fox was roaming about in the forest, he came upon a pair of tiger-cubs who had some flesh before them. Immediately, the fox thought upon a plan to eat the flesh. From a distance, he shook the basket quickly and spoke out, "Where have your parents gone ? Have they run away after coming to know of my arrival ? Where are they ? Tell me." At the rough words of the fox, the cubs shrank in fear and replied in a soft voice, "Both of our parents have gone out to hunt." The fox said, "Alright, when they return, tell them that I came. See, it has been a long time since your father borrowed a part of my wealth with this basket. He has not returned the debt till this day. I can not wait for long today. Whenever he comes back tell him about this. I am hungry. See if there is something to eat for me and I will leave." So saying, the fox ate the flesh left for the cubs by their parents. Then he left the place with a full stomach.

When the tiger and the tigress were away hunting, the fox used to come everyday. He threatened the cubs and partook of their share of flesh which was kept for them as food. Thus several days passed. On seeing the lean feature of the cubs, the tigress thought about the reason behind, "Why are they becoming like this? Does someone come and cheat them and eat the flesh we leave for them to eat?" Thinking on this line, the tigress said to her husband, "Do you hear? Today you needn't go for hunting. I will go alone. It has to be seen if someone comes when we are not here. Today, you hide and watch." Saying this, the tigress went to hunt alone leaving the tiger to stay behind at home.

As on other days, that day too the fox came by shaking the basket to create a false show in front of the cubs and, as he was about to eat the flesh, the tiger who was hiding at a distance, understood his design. He rushed instantly to attack the fox. The cunning fox had already devised a plan to escape whenever he had to face such a situation. Accordingly, he ran and passed through the fork of a tree. The tiger too tried to pass through the fork between the branches. But he got stuck into it. The harder the tiger tried to get out of the trap, the more he was squeezed into it. His shouts rang throughout the forest. Buffaloes, cows, deer and all other animals ran helter skelter. Hearing the screams of the tiger, the tigress too reached the spot hurriedly. The fox

was standing at a distance. On seeing the tigress, he said, "See, the trap I have put your husband into. He did not want to repay the debt, now how do you feel ? I will kill you too. If you want to repay my debt, give it now. If you do not have wealth, stay under my tutelage and obey my orders. Or else, you have no security. Know that for sure. I will finish off your young ones too."

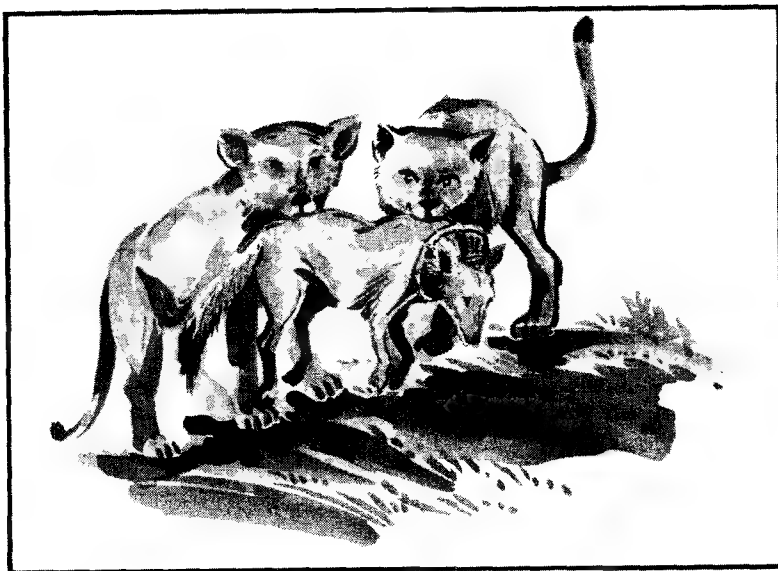
About this time, the tiger died. Finding no other alternative, the tigress became sub-ordinate to the fox. From that day onwards, the fox began to eat fearlessly on others' food. He used to send the tigress to hunt and sit cross-legged with bellyfuls of flesh.

After some days, it was time for the tigress to change its den. The tigress was getting ready with her cubs to cross a river and go to another forest. The fox too came along. The tigress and the cubs swam across the river. In order to maintain his dignity, the fox too jumped into the river. Seeing the fox being swept by the force of the current and drifting away, the tigress caught hold of him. On reaching dry land, the fox uttered angrily, "Why did you bring me up ? Who asked you to do so ? How I wish you females had some intelligence. The prince of the river has to repay me a debt. He tries to escape whenever he sees me. Today he was in my grip like a fish, I caught him tight as I saw him. I thought of holding him up until he cleared his debt. So, I was having a fight with him. You spoiled everything. Tell me, why did you stand up like a barrier to me ?"

Deceiving in this way, he maintained his superiority and stayed with the tigress again. Slowly, the tiger-cubs began to understand things. They fixed their turns for going on hunting along with their mother and the fox. On the days of the fox's turn, he would tell made-up stories to them in order to escape. One day, being unable to refuse any more, the fox went along with the tigress to hunt a deer. The fox said to the tigress, "I shall wait on the track of the deer. You go your way and chase it. As it comes near me, where shall it escape ?" Accordingly, the tigress chased the deer. But as the fox was lying at full length across the track, the deer ran over his belly and escaped. As a result, the skin of his belly was ruptured. After the deer escaped, the tigress came near the fox. The fox groaned as he said to her, "Do you hear me, do you ? When the deer came this way, I laughed so much that I could not control myself. For a

hero like me to catch such a small deer made me laugh so much that it seemed to me as if the my stomach would burst."

This time too the fox won the game by his shrewdness and continued to stay and eat at the tigress's place. But, as time passed, the cubs slowly began to realize the shrewdness of the fox and sought an opportunity to catch him red-handed. One night, hearing the cry of a fox, the basket-wearing one became excited. Unable to control his urge to cry out in his instinctive manner alongwith his folk, he ventured out. In order to confirm his pedigree, the cubs followed him quietly. And when he started to cry out, they came to know that he was none but a cunning fox for sure. In no time they rushed at him and crushed him to death.



In no time, the cubs rushed at the fox and crushed him to death.

Meanings :

pitha : a cake made of rice-powder.

Lakshmi : the Goddess of riches and prosperity; the wife of Lord Vishnu (in Hindu mythology).

THE TIGER AND THE CRAB

Long time ago, in a certain forest, there lived a tiger. As he was changing his den, he met a crab on the way. Accosting the tiger, the crab smiled and said, "Brother, where are you going ?" The tiger was pleased at this and replied, "I am going to another forest as I am changing my den. Where are you going ?" The crab said, "I am not going anywhere. My house is just near. I am a lonely creature, I have no near and dear ones." The tiger said, "Same is the case with me. I am also lonely and hapless. I too have no one." This way they conversed and after that, they became so pleased with each other that they began to stay near



The tiger and the crab began to stay near each other in the forest.

each other in the forest.

They continued to live in harmony for some days. The tiger used to hunt down deer and the two shared and ate with great delight. Seeing that the tiger was a friend of the crab, other animals did not dare to do it any harm. One day, the crab said to the tiger, "Friend, I am tired of eating flesh. To tell you the truth, the consumption of flesh daily is slowly making me dyspeptic. As such, how would it be if we eat vegetarian meals at times ? Let us cultivate." The tiger said, "What is there so difficult in agriculture ? If you think it is good, let's cultivate." So saying, the tiger agreed to the crab's plan. As such, the crab said, "In that case, Friend, you go to the village and bring some rice-seedlings from the paddy-field. I will till this part of land in the forest." Thus they discussed the matter. The crab began to dig the soil and the tiger stole seedlings of fine fragrant paddy from a nearby field and planted those in their plot of land.

Soon young stalks with grains began to emerge from the plants. Looking at the farm, the pleased crab said to the tiger, "We have grown paddy but, what would it be like if we do not have enough enough vegetables ? How shall we eat mere rice ? As such, we will have to grow vegetables too. You go and bring some seedlings of different kinds of vegetables from the village. Don't forget to bring a few seedlings of brinjal too. I am tilling the soil for the vegetable garden." So saying, the crab gave the tiger a basket to bring the required seedlings of vegetables and started to dig the soil with a hoe. The tiger had just taken a few steps when the crab called out loudly, "Friend, I forgot to tell you. Bring a few chilly-seedlings too. It won't be relishing if there are no chillies to accompany rice alongwith the delicious curry." The tiger agreed and ventured towards the village with long strides.

After cultivating the land, the two were in leisure. Slowly, winter set in. The paddy was ripening. The crab made arrangements for reaping the harvest. He said to the tiger, "Friend, I am taking the top." And the crab gathered the top of the plants, i.e., the grains. The tiger collected the stubbles. After that, it was time to pluck brinjals. The tiger asked the crab, "Friend, what will you take, the seed or the plant ?" The crab said that it would take the brinjal and did away with its share. The tiger took the rest of the plant. Thus, after

harvesting their crops, the tiger invited the crab for a feast. The tiger cooked the stubbles and the plant portion of the brinjal for the occasion. He served it out to the crab. But how could the crab have such a meal ? He touched a little before taking leave. However, even after that, the crab always used to relish sumptuous dishes at the tiger's place. But it never invited the tiger to have a meal at its place. The tiger was struck by this realization and one day said to the crab, "Friend, you have never invited me to your house for a feast. You arrange a feast some day and invite me. I want to taste the cooking at your place." The crab replied, "Friend, why shouldn't I invite you for a feast in my house ? I have always been planning to hold a feast and invite you. But my house is a narrow place. It worries me as to where to make you sit and where to entertain you ? I am in a dilemma because of these problems. Be it whatsoever, if you have no objection, please come to my humble dwelling for the morning meal. What do you say, friend ? It is a feast only in name, though." The tiger replied, "Sure, I am coming to attend the feast at your place tomorrow."

The following morning the crab arranged the feast. He cooked the finest rice and a brinjal-curry. The tiger arrived at the crab's house to attend the feast. The crab said to the tiger, "Friend, you better sit near my burrow. I will be giving out rice and curry. You keep on eating. After all, you cannot enter into my burrow." And so, the crab began to bring rice and curry to the mouth of its burrow and the tiger ate with relish. The crab's earthen cooking-pot was small. Whatever rice was cooked was finished by the tiger in two mouthfuls. So, the crab anticipated grave danger. He thought, "No one can read a tiger's intention. If he has not eaten well enough to satisfy himself, all his friendship towards me would vanish. Instead, he would feast on me in anger. As such, I have to think out a plan to escape from him." Thinking so, he said to the tiger, "Friend, carrying rice for you again and again has caused pain in my waist and I am unable to get up. You rather push your tail into my burrow and I will tie bowls of rice and curry onto it. You pull up and keep on eating." The tiger was unaware of the real purpose behind the crab's words and did as he was told. As soon as the tiger pushed his tail deep into the hole, the crab squeezed it with its pincers. The tiger suffered terrible pain

and tried to pull out its tail but it would not come out. Instead, the squeezing of the crab became more severe. The tiger lost his patience. He screamed so much that it seemed as if the skies would split. Still, the crab did not leave. As luck would have it, a farmer was digging the soil with a hoe in the field at that time. Hearing the tiger's screams, the farmer left digging and was about to run away with the hoe when the tiger saw him. He wailed and pleaded with the farmer as he said, "Hey Uncle ! Come this way, I am dying. The pain of the crab's squeezing will take my life. Please free my tail." The farmer replied, "I can't. Do you understand ? You are a tiger. You are not reliable. You will eat me up as soon as I make you free." The tiger said, "For God's sake, please come. I swear and promise truly; I won't eat you. Free me, my Lord. If you save me from this distress, I promise to kill a deer for you everyday." Hearing this, the farmer trusted the tiger and went near it. He cut the tiger's tail by striking it with the hoe and the tiger was freed. As the tiger was about to leave that place, he whispered in the farmer's ear, "According to my promise, I will deliver you a deer everyday. But you shall not divulge it to anybody. If you say, wherever you are, I will take you off immediately."

The farmer got a deer each day as he did the tiger a favour. Many days passed in this way. One day, the farmer fell sick. His mother called an old lady-augur to predict the future. After some incantation, the lady said that the farmer would be alright if they arrange a feast with venison for their neighbours. When his mother told her son about



On the day of the feast, all the guests were seated to eat.

this, he asked the tiger to bring two deer. On the day of the feast, the tiger killed two deer for the farmer.

On the day of the feast, all the guests were seated to eat. About that time, there was shortage of a plantain-leaf. One of them went to the backyard to bring a leaf from the banana-plant and saw that there was a large heap of bones. The man was surprised at the sight and returned without a leaf. He said to them, "We cannot have a feast in the farmer's house. He eats something. All of you may come and see to judge for yourselves wherefrom did he get so many bones to pile up?" At this, all rose up from their seats to see and found that it was true. Then, they asked the farmer, "Tell, whose bones are these ? Or else, we shall not eat in your house." The farmer said, "These are the bones of an animal that I ate and nothing else. Don't feel bad about it. But I cannot tell you the details of the matter. If I do so, the tiger will take me away. As such, you dispel all doubts. Pardon me and enjoy the feast." The assembled people did not believe his words and said, "We are surrounding you with sharp weapons. You say or else we leave". The farmer felt helpless at their resolve. He knelt down as he began to relate the matter and all surrounded him with sharp weapons for protection. As soon as the farmer finished his story, all of a sudden the tiger appeared on the scene from somewhere, seized him and took him away. The assembled guests stood amazed in fear for some time. Then, failing to find him anywhere, they left the place completely baffled.

The farmer on the other hand, was taken to a deep forest. Fortunately for him, at that time, his stomach began to make sounds out of hunger. On hearing the gurgling sound, the tiger asked him, "Who is gurgling in your stomach?" The landlord quickly thought out a plan. He replied, "When I was a child, my mother fed me 120 crabs. Of those, sixty came out earlier and the other sixty remained inside. Now, they want to come out." At the mention of the word 'crab', the tiger thought, "I am finished ! It took one crab to make me suffer a hellish torture. Now, if sixty crabs are about to come out, our whole folk would be annihilated." Thinking this, the tiger left the farmer and escaped.

Being left by the tiger, the farmer slowly went to the bank of a river and stopped under a tree. He saw that the place beneath the

tree was a retreat of wild buffaloes. The buffaloes weren't there at that time. So, he licked the scum of the milk found on the ground in a hurry. Then, he swept, scrubbed and cleaned the place. After that, he climbed the tree and stayed on it.

All the buffaloes returned in the evening after grazing. They were surprised to see their place so tidy. They looked in all directions but could not see anyone. They conversed among themselves and slept. The next morning, when all the buffaloes went out to graze, the farmer came down the tree. He licked the scum of the milk which fell on the ground from the mouth of the calves when they were sucking their mothers. As on the previous day, he swept the place well, threw out the dung, cleaned properly and then climbed onto the tree. That evening too, the buffaloes were surprised to see their shelter neat and clean. They wanted to know the being connected with this work. They discussed the matter and decided to appoint an old buffalo as the observer. The next morning they acted according to their plan and went out to graze. At the time of going, they said to the old buffalo, "You keep proper watch and see who comes to clean our place. We will bring grass and water for you." But the mid-day sunshine made the old buffalo fall asleep. When the buffalo slept, the farmer got down from the tree stealthily. As before, he liked the scum, cleaned the place and went up the tree. The old buffalo could not have the slightest idea.

The buffaloes returned in the evening and asked the old-fellow if he saw anyone. He said, "I did not see anything." They realized that the old buffalo was good for nothing. The next day, they appointed a behind she-buffalo as the observer. She also slept with her blind-eye uppermost. That day too, the farmer did as he did on other days and climbed the tree. The blind she-buffalo did not see anything. In the evening, when the herd of buffaloes came and asked her about any news, she replied, "I did not see anything." They understood that she must have slept by keeping her blind-eye upwards. So they decided to appoint the head-buffalo as the observer. Next day, they acted accordingly. But that day too, the head-buffalo felt drowsy. The farmer climbed down the tree as before and ate the scum. After cleaning the place, he was just climbing the tree in a hurry when the head-buffalo woke up. On seeing him, she ran



The buffalo asked, "Are you a god or a man?"

towards him and asked, "Are you a god or a man? Tell. But whatever you are, come down." The farmer said, "I am no god. I am a man. I will not climb down. If I do, you will gore me to death." The she-buffalo said, "I won't harm you, come down." The farmer said, "No, you will kill me." The buffalo solemnly promised that she won't hurt him. At this, the landlord climbed down the tree. He told her everything in detail. On hearing him, she felt pity for him. She told him, "Henceforth, you will stay here without fear. We designate you as our lord and we will provide you with adequate food and shelter.

When the other buffaloes returned in the evening, the head-buffalo narrated the whole episode to them. They were also delighted and accepted him as their lord. After this, they killed the blind she-buffalo and gave her horns to the farmer. As they did so, they said to him, "Of these two horns, one is the horn of sorrow and the other is the horn of joy. When we are out grazing and you play the horn

of joy, we will know that you are fine and so graze happily. And if you are in any danger and play the horn of sorrow, we will hurry back to you for your protection. You maintain the cleanliness of our shelter as you used to do earlier."

Time passed on in this way. But one day, as the farmer was sitting on a branch of the tree and was combing his hair, suddenly a long hair fell into the river. This hair was eaten up by a large fish. One day, a fisherman caught the fish. As the fish was large and full of fats, he went and presented it to the king as a tribute.

The king had a beautiful daughter. While the attendants were dressing and slicing out the fish, they discovered the hair inside it. The daughter was also standing near them all the time. Seeing such a long and beautiful hair from the stomach of the fish, the daughter secretly acknowledged the owner as her husband. She took the hair and placed it in a small casket and confined herself in a solitary chamber. When the king asked his daughter the reason behind her action, she said that she would come out of the chamber only if she is married to the owner of the hair or else she would die of hunger and thirst. On hearing his daughter, the king was wonder-struck. How could he search out the person whose hair was found in the fish? The princess was also adamant. Perplexed, the king was thinking about all these. In his predicament, the king was racking his brains to find out a solution.

The princess had a pet-raven. Realizing the trouble of the king, it approached him and said, "Your Majesty, don't worry. I will find out the owner of the hair. You just give me a ripe mango." Relying on the raven's assurance, the king was somewhat relieved. He hurriedly handed over a ripe mango to the raven. It took the mango and went to the forest where the farmer stayed. Approaching him, it cried aloud -----

"Who plays the horns of joy and sorrow ?

Who would like to eat the ripe mango ?"

At the mention of ripe mango, the farmer's mouth watered. He replied -----

"I play the horns of joy and sorrow.

I shall like to have the ripe mango."

When the farmer said this, the raven gave the ripe mango to him.

As the landlord extended his hand to take the fruit, the raven snatched away the horn of sorrow instantly and fled. People say that, "The crow is the cleverest among the birds."

On the other hand, the raven handed over the horn of sorrow to the king and said, "The owner of this horn is the owner of the hair. You send a few messengers alongwith me. I will show him." As reported by the raven, the king sent a few messengers alongwith him. Now, it was easy to bring the farmer as he lost his power with the loss of the horn of sorrow. The messengers caught hold of the farmer and brought him to the king. When the messengers were escorting him, the farmer tore his garments into shreds and dropped the pieces on the way. In the evening, when the buffaloes returned and didn't find the landlord, they thought that he must be in danger. They followed the track which was strewn with strips of torn garments of the farmer and reached the king's palace. The king was scared when he saw the herd of wild buffaloes. But the farmer pacified him by saying that they belonged to him. At sight of the farmer, the herd of buffaloes began to dance. The king said to the farmer, "If they belong to you, can you ride on item ?"

The farmer replied in the affirmative and showed the feat. The king was pleased at the proof. He gave his daughter to the farmer in marriage and crowned his son-in-law the king and he himself remained as the royal guardian.

TEJEEMOLA

A merchant had two wives. The elder one had a daughter *Tejeemola* by name. The younger wife had no issue. *Tejeemola*'s mother died when she was an infant. As such, she was brought up by her step-mother. The same *Tejeemola* who was the apple of her father's eyes, was hated by her step-mother to a degree. It was only out of fear of her husband that she brought up *Tejeemola*.

As days passed, *Tejeemola* attained girlhood. Her father made her make friends with a girl of her age from a respectable family of the same village.

Tejeemola's father was a trader; it would not do if he did not go out on business. As such, he had to go out to far away places for



At the time of departure, he called his wife and entrusted his loving daughter to her.

trade and commerce. This time, he had to go to a distant place for months on business. As such, at the time of departure, he called his wife and entrusting his loving daughter to her, said, "This time, I am going to a foreign country for months. I am handing over my *Tejeemola* to you. She is a beloved girl, treat her with tenderness and care."

The wife of the merchant thought, "This time it will be very convenient for me. Within these months, I will do away with my 'eye-sore'. I will fulfil my desire by thrashing her." And she thought, "I won't let her go only by thrashing. If I leave her like that and if he somehow comes to know of her fate on his return, a noisy dispute would ensue. I will put an end to this danger completely. When marrying her off, I will have to give her a handsome dowry. Things from my house. She is the daughter of my husband's first wife. I didn't have the fate to beget any children of my own---- of what use is taking care of the daughter of hers? The wealth which her father may give her on her marriage would be beneficial to me if I take it away to my mother's house. Therefore, before her father returns, I have to plan out and put an end to her." Thinking so, since the day the merchant departed on his voyage, the step-mother began to find fault as a pretext to harm her and finding *Tejeemola* alone, she began to punish her as much as she could.

Meanwhile, the friend of *Tejeemola* was getting married. The marriage was scheduled to be held on the day after the next. *Tejeemola* was invited to attend the marriage-ceremony. She was to stay at her friend's for a few days, have fun and frolic, anoint the bride with requisite preparations, bathe her and take part in her marriage. *Tejeemola* too had a great desire to stay at her friend's house during the days of marriage and have fun and frolic.

Thinking that the possibility of accomplishing her plot was approaching, the step-mother permitted *Tejeemola* to attend the marriage. Pretending to show that she was taking out clothes for *Tejeemola* to wear on the occasion of the marriage, she opened different caskets and chests. "Will this dress suit you, our daughter? Will these items of dress please you?" Saying such things, the step-mother did a nice show. She had a beautiful set of silken dress and a shawl delicately embroidered with golden thread. Finally, her step-mother gave those to *Tejeemola* to wear at the marriage and

said, "Dear, I will tie this set and the shawl in a bundle for you. Now you go to your friend's house in your casual dress. When you reach near your friend's house, you change for the clothes in the bundle. If you wear those clothes now on, they would become dirty with dust on your way as you go there on foot." Saying this, the step-mother secretly placed a mouse secretly placed a mouse and a burning piece of coal in the shawl. Then she made a bundle and handed it to Tejeemola.

When Tejeemola was about to reach her friend's house, according to her step-mother's instruction, she untied the bundle in order to wear the dress. As soon as she untied the bundle, a mouse jumped out of it and a piece of burning-coal fell from the shawl. Tejeemola was perplexed to see that the set was gnawed by the mouse and the shawl was burnt at places. Tejeemola's face became ashen out of fear. She trembled and began to cry pathetically. The people who

saw her were also surprised at that unusual incident. Finally, after solace and consolation, Tejeemola was taken to her friend's house. A set of dress and a shawl were brought for her. She was dressed up in them to attend the marriage-ceremony. As the marriage was over, Tejeemola returned home. When her step-mother asked her about the clothes, she trembled in fear and cast down the bundle containing the burned and gnawed clothes in front of her. On seeing the condition



Tejeemola's stem-mother pounded her right hand.

of the clothes, in her false show of fury, she abused and beat Tejeemola mercilessly. Even after beating Tejeemola, she was not satisfied. Later, the step-mother dragged Tejeemola to sit near the *dhekee* (paddy-husking pedal). Then she made Tejeemola push forward the paddy and began to pound it with great force. While her step-mother was pounding, she suddenly dropped the pedal on Tejeemola's right hand. Her right hand being pounded, Tejeemola began to scream in agony. At this, the step-mother began to strike Tejeemola's back with a broom-stick and ordered her to push paddy into the right place using her left hand. When Tejeemola was pushing the paddy with her left hand, the step-mother caused injury to her left hand too. After injuring the left hand, the step-mother told Tejeemola to push forward the paddy using her right foot and pounded it. Then she pounded the left foot too in the same way. Finally the step-mother asked Tejeemola to push forward the paddy using her head. The step-mother then smashed her head. As a result, Tejeemola died.

In this way, the merchant's wife killed her husband's beloved daughter Tejeemola. Without anyone noticing her, she dug a pit in the ground just below the eaves of the shed where rice was pounded and, buried Tejeemola there.

After some days, a plant of bottle-gourd grew luxuriantly at the place where Tejeemola was buried. It bore nice fruits. On the other hand, when the neighbours didn't see Tejeemola for many days, they enquired of the stepmother about her. The step-mother replied, "Tejeemola has not yet returned from her friend's place."

One day, on seeing the gourds growing on the thatched roof of the shed, an old beggar-woman came to the merchant's wife and asked for a gourd. Since the day the step-mother killed Tejeemola, she did not go to the shed. So she did not notice the gourd-plant. As such, she replied to the old beggar-woman, "Where shall I find a gourd for you? I myself have not eaten gourd for many days." The beggar-woman said, "Why do you say like that? The thatched roof of your shed is full of gourds." On hearing the old woman, the merchant's wife was surprised and said, "I have not seen any. If you have seen, go and take as many as you want." At this, the old woman came near the plant. As she extended her hand to pluck a gourd, the plant wailed out -----



On hearing the gourd-plant speak, the old woman was terrified.

"Don't extend your hand, don't pluck a gourd.

Where from have you come beggar ?

Alongwith the silk-clothes, my stepmother pounded me,

I am only Tejeemola."

On hearing the plant speak, the terrified old woman didn't pluck any gourd. She came up to the merchant's wife and said, "Madam, when I extended my hand to pluck a gourd, the plant spoke out to me. I don't want any gourd. I am taking leave." Saying this, the old beggar-woman left. Then the merchant's wife understood the actual meaning behind the matter. She took a knife and cut the plant. She pulled it out and threw it away in

the backyard.

After a few days, a plant bearing citrus fruits grew up in the place where the gourd-plant was thrown and the branches were full of delicious fruits. The tree bore such an abundance of fruits that it was bent under pressure. One day, some cowherds noticed the plant while grazing cows and wanted to eat the fruits. They came to the merchant's wife and said, "Madam, would you give us a few fruits to eat ?" The merchant's wife said, "Where shall I find them ?" Then they said, "Why Madam ? At our backyard, there is a plant which is fully loaded with the fruits." On hearing them, the merchant's wife was surprised and said, "I have not seen any such fruit in our premises. If you have seen any, go and take as many as you want."

With the permission of the merchant's wife, the cowherds went near the plant. When they were about to pluck a fruit, the tree wailed out saying -----

"I call you my brothers.

Don't extend your hands, don't pluck a fruit,
but go back home.

Alongwith silk-clothes, my step-mother pounded me,
I am only Tejeemola."

On hearing this wail, the cowherds thought that the plant was haunted by some evil spirit or ghost. They reported the incident to the merchant's wife and went away. The merchant's wife suddenly remembered that she threw the gourd-plant at that spot after cutting it. Remembering this, she understood that it was Tejeemola in the guise of a plant. Thinking this, the merchant's wife cut the plant and threw it into the river.

The plant floated along the river and stuck on the mud near a mooring for boats. It turned into a lotus-plant and was blooming with beautiful flowers. After some days, Tejeemola's father was returning from trade on boat by that river itself. On seeing the beautiful lotus flowers on the plant, he thought of taking one for Tejeemola. He asked a boat-man to pluck a flower and fetch it. When the boat-man stretched out his hand to pluck one, the lotus wailed as it sang -----

"Don't extend your hand, don't pluck a flower.
Where from have you come boat-man ?
Alongwith silk-clothes, my step-mother pounded me,
I am only Tejeemola."



On hearing the flower wail out, the boatman was terrified.

On hearing the flower wail out, the boatman was terrified. When he told the merchant about the incident, the merchant went near the plant in curiosity. As he stretched out his hand to pluck a flower, it again wailed out -----

"Don't extend your hand, don't pluck a flower, dear father.

Alongwith silk-clothes, my stepmother pounded me,
I am only Tejeemola."

The father knew the nature of his wife. So he thought, "She must be Tejeemola for sure !" Thinking this, the merchant took a chewed mixture of areca-nut from his mouth in his left hand and a sweetmeat in his right hand. Then he said, "If you are my Tejeemola, then you would surely turn into a *saalika*, fly and come to eat this chewed mixture. And if you are not my daughter but someone else, then you would take the sweetmeat." When he said this, the lotus-flower turned into a *saalika*, flew to him and ate the chewed mixture by resting on his hand. Then the father was doubly sure that it was Tejeemola and put the *saalika* into a cage and took her with him.

On reaching home, the merchant asked his wife, "Where has Tejeemola gone ?" She replied, "She has gone to her uncle's house." The merchant elicited the truth from her by cross-examination and made her confess. After that, he threw his handkerchief on the 'bird' and said, "If you are my Tejeemola and if I have love for you, you will turn into a human-being by putting on this handkerchief." The 'bird' turned into Tejeemola herself then and there. On his part, the merchant instantly drove his wife out from house.

Meanings :

Tejeemola : *Tejee* --- spirited, vigorous.

Mola --- a small round earthen vessel.

dhekee : a pedal for cleaning or pounding rice.

saalika : a kind of bird; sterling, Indian mynah.

THE OLD COUPLE AND THE JACKALS

There lived an old couple. One day, the old man brought some arum and began to plant them. At about this time, some jackals came and said to him, "Grandpa, are you planting the arum raw or cooked



The jackals asked, "Grandpa, are you planting the arum raw or cooked?"

?" The old man replied, "Well, I am planting raw arum. At the old man's words, the jackals said to him, "You don't know how to plant arum. First, you boil them. And wherever you plant, dig a hole there and leave them under cover. You will see them grow overnight into mature plants." The old man replied, "Alright, I will plant the arum according to your suggestion."

Accordingly, the old man boiled all the arums and planted them in the evening. At night, the jackals came, ate the boiled arums with delight and left. Next morning, when the old man went to the arum-garden, he could not see a single arum-plant out there. Then only he

realized the deceit of the jackals and sat down-cast in shame.

A few days after this incident, the old man thought of a plan and said to his wife, "Well, my lady, massage some sticky molasses on my body today. When swarms of flies come and fall on my body to taste the molasses, you cry out lamenting that your old husband has died. When the jackals come near you hearing your cry and enquire about me, just tell them that I am no more. Tell them to carry out my dead body from inside the house and to eat it. You conceal a large stick near me. When they enter the house to carry me out, you close the door gently. As soon as you do so, I will get up and beat them to death with the stick." When the old woman did according to the old man's instruction, the jackals came and asked her, "Grandma, why do you cry? What has happened?" The old woman said, "Don't you know that our old man has died today? If you all can take him out and eat him up, please do so." At the words of the old woman, the jackals were delighted. With the intention of taking out the dead man's body, they entered the house. At this, the old woman closed the door. The old man got up instantly and began to beat the jackals to death with the heavy stick. Only four jackals somehow managed to escape.

After some days, the old woman said to the old man, "I have not ventured out for quite some time in fear of the jackals. I want to go to my daughter's house to meet her, I am not happy these days." The old man said, "If you go, the jackals will eat you if they



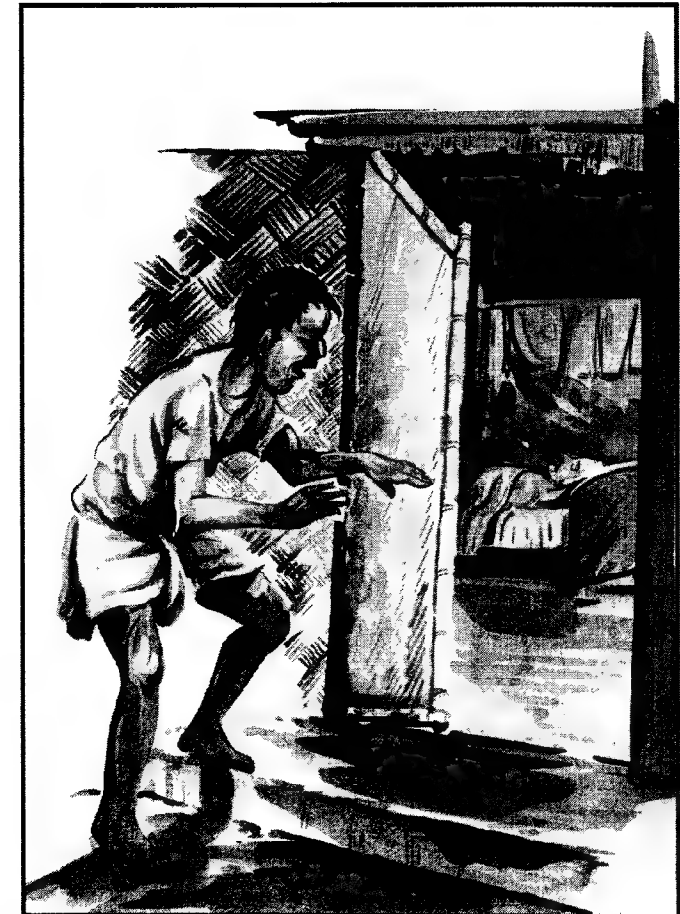
The old man got up instantly and began to beat the jackals to death.

find you alone." The old woman said, "They can not harm me, I will go somehow." Saying this, she set out to her daughter's house. On the way, finding that the old woman was alone, the jackals surrounded her and said, "You old lady, we are not going to leave you today. We will eat you." The old woman replied, "If you want to eat, then you will eat. But I have not seen my daughter for a long time. I am not in a happy state of mind. As such, before dying, I wish to see her once. You can eat me on my return." The jackals said, "What if you don't come back?" The old woman replied, "How can I stay back leaving my old man? I promise to return soon along this way itself. And you will do whatever you want to do with me." The jackals trusted the old woman and let her go. She reached her daughter's house and stayed there for a few days. It was time for her to leave. She told her daughter of the jackal episode. Her daughter said, "Mother, I have a large gourd-shell in my house. You enter inside it and you will reach home by rolling in it. The jackals would not see you." Accordingly, the old woman entered the gourd-shell and set out by rolling along the way. She was about to reach home when the jackals saw the strange sight and began to discuss among themselves, "This is a very strange thing. How can a gourd roll over? This is certainly not a gourd. There is something inside it." Saying so, they broke the gourd kicking over it and the old woman was exposed. When they happened to see the old woman, they cheered in delight with their cry. They said, "Old woman, you wanted to escape thus by cheating us. Do you know what will happen to you now? We shall eat you." The old woman said, "What to do? You shall eat me just as you want. But I have learnt a beautiful new dance at my daughter's place. My dance will end with me when I shall die. As such, let me dance in your presence. Then you eat me." Unable to hold back their curiosity, they agreed. At that, the old woman said, "I shall commence to sing, you utter your appreciation. Then only I shall have the spirit to dance nicely." The old woman had two dogs ---- one was named 'Brownie', the other was named 'Blackie'. She began to twist, turn and dance as she sang out, "Come Brownie, Come Blackie!" The jackals also cried in unison. This way, the old woman sang out a dozen times and the two dogs, Brownie and Blackie, rushed to the spot. Seeing the dogs, the jackals ran away out of fear. The old woman thus returned home safe and sound.

THE LONG-LEGGED VISITOR

There was an old woman. She had a herd of cows and lived economically by selling milk. Her bed-room was very old. The hay which made up her thatched roof was thinning off. As such, water leaked through the roof when it rained. One cloudy night, after her dinner, she prayed as she was about to sleep, "O God, may the long-legged doesn't come". So saying, she went to sleep on her bed.

That night, a thief came to steal a cow belonging to the old woman. He was hiding beside the cow shed as he was waiting for



That night, a thief came to steal a cow.

the old woman to go to sleep. A tiger too had come with a desire to feast on the old woman's cow. He came silently in the dark and entered among the cows in the shed and waited for the old woman to sleep. Both the tiger and the thief heard the words of the old woman. But they could not understand the meaning of the word 'long-legged'. They started thinking, "What is the long-legged?"

The old woman fell into deep sleep after having her heavy meal. The thief entered the cow-shed in order to steal one. He thought, "How do I recognise in the dark which cow would be healthy and which one would be sick? As such, the cow which would jump up when I touch the buttock must be active and in good health". He decided on this and began to rub gently on the hinds of the cows with his hand. As he was doing so, he touched the hinds of the tiger. The tiger jumped up. The thief thought, "This is a very smart cow. I have to take this one." Thinking this, he twisted the tiger's tail. As

he was about to chase the tiger, it thought the thief to be the 'long-legged' mentioned by the old woman. Thinking so, the tiger jumped up again. The thief thought, "This one is no ordinary cow. Unless I ride on its back, I would not be able to take it away". Thinking that, the thief mounted on the back of the tiger. At that, the tiger was doubly sure



The tiger sped away with the thief on his back.

that the long-legged had caught him. He ran out of the cow-shed. Assessing the strength of the 'cow', the thief understood, "It is not a cow. It must be the 'long-legged'. Today, it has caught me." Both of them thought each other to be the 'long-legged' and were petrified in fear.

As the tiger sped away with the thief on his back and was about to enter the forest, the thief held on to the tiger by claspings its neck. Then, the tiger thought, "Oh! This one is not the long-legged, it is a 'neck-twister'." The tiger ran even faster in fear. Unable to hold onto its neck, the thief caught the tiger's tail. At this, the speed of the tiger rose even higher. Unable to carry on with the tiger's increasing speed, the thief could not control his position on its back but tumbled over on the ground. But as he held the tail of the tiger very tightly, it gave way and remained in his hand. The tiger ran and escaped. On reaching the depth of the forest, he breathed in relief. He thought that he was not caught by a 'neck-twister' but a 'tail-snatcher'. On the other hand, the thief also realized that the tail in his hand was not that of a cow or any other animal. It was that of a tiger! It was then that he was terribly scared. It was quite late at night. So, in order to pass the rest of the night, the thief climbed onto a nearby tall mango-tree.

As for the tiger, when he told his kith and kin and friends about the tail-snatcher, they thought over the matter. They concluded that this has been a matter of great shame. They are the lords of the jungle. As such, it is highly intolerable that the 'tail-snatcher' has done away with the tail of a fellow cousin. If they do not take some action, they will have to face great disgrace. Not only that, if some animal called 'tail-snatcher' has appeared on the scene who is stronger than they are, they would certainly be ridiculed. From the king's status, they would be degraded to ordinary denizens of the forest." Realizing that, all the tigers assembled in a meeting and after deliberations, decided to wage a war against the 'tail-snatcher'.

About forty tigers went on in search of the tail-snatcher but, the fellow was not to be seen anywhere. Finally, a tiger's eye fell upon the mango-tree where the 'tail-snatcher' was sitting. He pointed out the 'tail-snatcher' to his fellow-tigers and all of them growled together. After contemplating for some time, they decided upon a plan. In order to reach the 'tail-snatcher', they began to climb one on top of

the other to gain the required height. The thief thought of the imminent danger before him. He realized that his death was approaching near. The thief too hit upon a plan instantly. He saw the tiger who was caught by the 'tail-snatcher' on the ground at the bottom of the column of tigers. He called out to the blunt-tailed tiger in a deep voice, "You blunted, be careful!" The blunted tiger thought, "The tail-snatcher seems to get on me again, leaving the others." Thinking this, he lost his wit and ran away into the forest. As he did so, the tigers who climbed on his back fell onto the ground one after another. They too said, "The tail-snatcher has caught on us too." So saying, they ran away in fear and escaped into the forest.

The thief spent the night on the tree. Next morning, he climbed down and went home. And from then onwards, he swore not to steal any more.

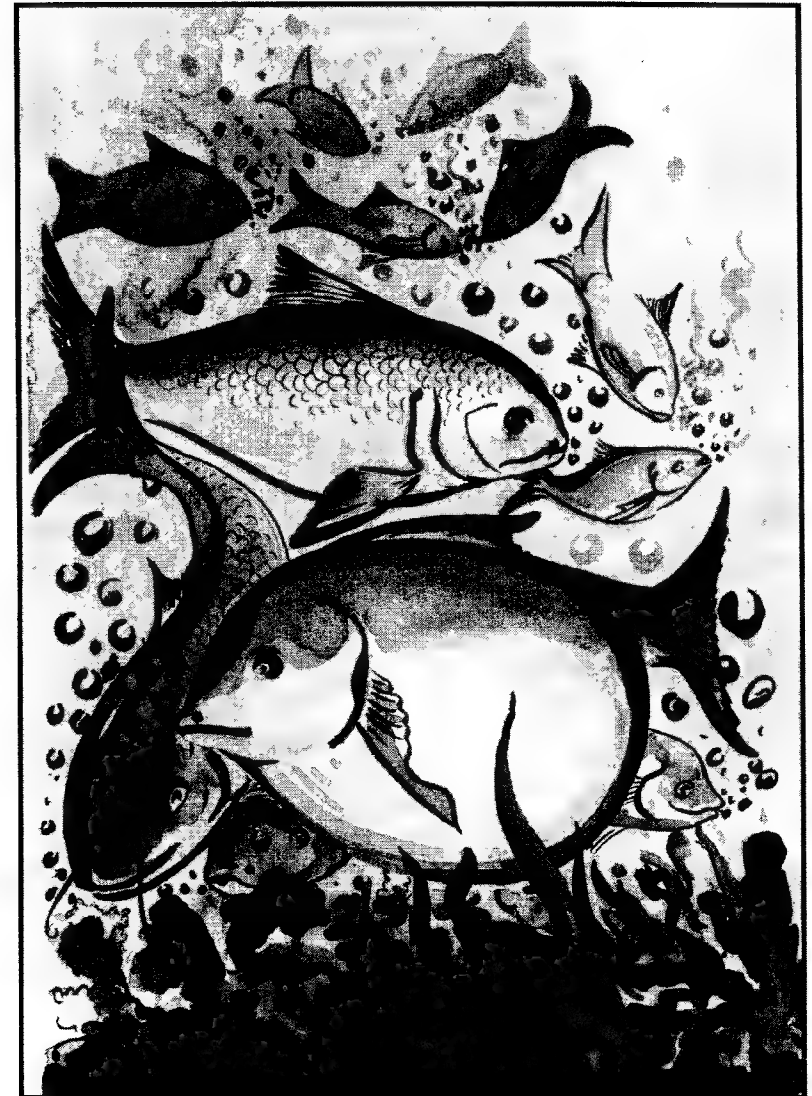
Meaning :-

the long-legged : rain.

GONGATOU

(The Globe Fish)

One day the different kinds of fish assembled at the deepest and broadest part of a lake in order to confer and decide to wage a war against the fish-eating animals. Starting from the largest to the



All kinds of fish came to the meeting.

smallest, all kinds of fish came to the meeting. When all assembled, the bald-headed old *goroi* was acknowledged as the speaker of the meeting and the swift *sengeli* was given the duty of a messenger. The messenger asked *gongatoup* to explain in detail to all the assembled guests the reason behind holding the meeting. With folded hands, *gongatoup* started to say, "Honourable guests ! Today, with great humility and as per the order of our messenger, *Sengeli kokai*, I would like to speak a few words. If somehow there is an impropriety in my speech, I hope you would pardon my fault taking me to be a foolish being. This is my prayer to you."

"Of all animals, the animal called man is the chief enemy of ours. They catch us by using various traps and then, by dipping us in hot oil or burning coal; they fry, burn, roast by rolling us on green leaves, grill us on spits, boil and eat us. But all of you may notice one thing. Even though they catch us this way and torment us, God has created and sent them as slaves of other animal species. You all go round every house of the animal called man. You would see how they are serving cows, buffaloes, horses, goats etc. They are giving cows, horses fodder to eat, spreading out straw for them to sleep, and building houses for them to stay. They are even cleaning the dung and excrements of cows, horses and goats."

"Honourable brethren ! In a way, it seems that the human species must have been calves in the past. This is because they drink cow's milk. In quadrupeds, it is seen that a young one grows up by drinking its mother's milk. If we think over all this properly, we would understand that the human species is entirely cow-like and has no intelligence at all. As such, we can kill the block-head humans in no time."

"Respectable guests ! I am an ignorant creature. I have not been able to put up a proper picture of human-beings before you. I don't know why my aunt *gadgedee* hasn't come to the meeting today. If she had been here, she would have been able to tell you in detail about this wicked species of animal called man. She could have said to us about the ways of killing human-beings; the means, the tactics, everything in detail. That is because her mouth is wide. I have heard

that---- in the past, during the Kurukshetra battle, among the millions of troops, my aunt *gadgedee* swallowed a million with that mouth. As such, call her soon and take the proof of my words."

After *gongatoup*'s speech, the speaker of the meeting ordered the messenger *sengeli* to bring *gadgedee* immediately. In an instant, the messenger sent a *goroi-sirika* to *gadgedee*'s house. Reaching there, it cried aloud ----

"Sister *gadgedee*, O *gadgedee*,
won't you go to the meeting ?"

Gadgedee was very angry at these words. She reproved the messenger curtly as she said, "Slavish fish, eater of young ones, I won't go." At this reply, the messenger felt insulted and returned. When it told about this to the assembled guests, with the permission of the speaker, *gongatoup* himself went to call his aunt. Although *gadgedee* refused to go to the meeting earlier, she thought that it would not be fair to disobey a public request. So, she got ready by dressing herself up and applying the vermilion spot and streak on her forehead. At about this time, *gongatoup* came and said ----

"Aunt *kaansonmoti*, O *kaansonmoti*,
won't you go to the meeting?"

Hearing the sweet words, *gadgedee*'s anger disappeared in no time. She answered in delight ----

"Yes, only the good knows the value of the good.
Isn't it our son *Gongadhor* ?"

"Let's go, *gongai bopa*, let's go." The praise of him from his aunt elated him so greatly that he became restless in joy. No one had ever praised him in this way. As such, he felt that he could touch the heavens with his bare 'hands' and swelled in pride. The more he began to ruminate over his aunt's words, the more swollen his belly became. As *gongatoup* walked, his swollen belly began to swell up at every step. When he reached near the meeting, suddenly his belly burst out making the sound of a gun. As the sound of *gongatoup*'s rupture of his belly was like that of a gun, the assembled guests were terrified and ran helter-skelter.

Meanings :

- gongatoup* : a globe fish, a fish whose belly expands when air is taken in.
- goroi* : a kind of fish.
- sengeli* : a kind of muddy-water fish.
- kokai* : a word used in addressing an elderly man or an elder brother.
- gadgetee* : nandus marmaratus; a kind of dull fish (also called as '*kaansonmoti*' in some parts of Assam).
- goroi-sirika* : the young one of goroi fish.
- kaansonmoti* : gold-like, a kind of flower.
- Gongadhor* : a name of Lord Shiva (one of the Gods of the Hindu Trinity).
- bopa* : a term of endearment used in addressing a boy or a young man.

THE SON BORN LATE

There was an old couple. In their old age, a son was born to them. But the old man could not decide a name for his son. As such, he went to an astrologer to select a name. The astrologer enquired of the old man and finding that the child was born in his old age and was quite late, he named him "*Nomol*".



In their old age, a son born to the old couple.

The old man presented the astrologer with a shawl and a silver coin. On his way, in the apprehension of forgetting the name, the old man called out loudly --- "*Nomol*", "*Nomol*" repeatedly. While coming home, his utterance changed from "*Nomol*" to "*Namel*". While proceeding by the bank of a river, a merchant tied his boat on the bank. The old man neared the merchant's boat when the merchant ordered the boat-men to untie the boat. They were about to untie the mooring-cable when they heard the old man passing by call out loudly - "*Namel*", "*Namel*" (which meant not to set sail in their language). On hearing that, they told the merchant, "Sir, an old man has prohibited us from untying the boat." At this, the merchant called for the old man and asked him the reason behind his prohibition. The old man thought that he might forget the name if he answered the merchant. He only went on uttering "*Namel*", "*Namel*". The merchant in his anger said roughly, "Having stayed here for long, I ordered my men to untie the boat. This unfortunate fellow has come from nowhere to obstruct my auspicious journey. Bind his arms behind his back." So saying, the merchant asked the boat-men to give the old man a sound thrashing. Being beaten, the old man forgot to utter "*Namel*" and instead, began to repeat "*Nohobor hole*", and went on his way home. [The words (in italics) in the local language meant the character of a cox-comb]. At about that time, he met a man dressed in a stylish apparel and passing along the same way. Hearing the words repeated by the old man, the man thought that he was laughed at by him on seeing his showy dress. So thinking, the man gave him a few blows with his stick. In his pain, the old man forgot the words "*Nohobor hole*", and began to cry, "*Sitotkoi ituhe sora*" (i.e., This one surpasses the other). At about this time, two persons affected with goitre passed by the old man. They thought that he was making fun of them on seeing their goitre. Presuming this, the angered men struck him until he was flat on the ground. Being beaten, the old man somehow managed to reach home by crawling and screaming in pain. Reaching home, he told his old wife about the dangers he had to face in detail. She said to him sadly, "Alright, whatever has happened, has happened. Now tell the name given by the astrologer." The old man said, "In the fre-

quency of assaults, all about the name has been erased from my mind. I have forgotten the name !"

In the circumstances, the old woman said, "If you have forgotten, then let it be, what to do ? Let the chapter of naming our son be closed. Now let us endeavour to cultivate plant our patch of land. Go and plant the *nomoliya* (tender) rice-seedlings." The very word "*nomoliya*" was enough to remind of his son's name --- "*Nomol*". At this, he told his wife angrily, "If you knew the name of my son, why did you let me suffer so much thrashing and beating ?" Saying so, the old man began to beat his wife till she prayed for his mercy.

The old couple then named their son '*Nomol*' and lived on happily ever afterwards.

Meanings :

Nomol : born last of all.

Namel : not to be untied, not to open.

nomoliya : tender, youngest of two or more.

THE FORTUNE TELLER

In a certain village, there lived a farmer named *Phoring*. His wife was of selfish nature. The household consisted only of the husband and the wife. They had no children. There was a slight drizzle in the winter month of January. Rising out of bed, early in the morning, Phoring said to his wife, "It's cloudy today. I want to have *pitha* (rice-cake). Can you bake me a few ? I won't take rice today." The wife replied, "Where is the kind of paddy needed for making cakes ? We do not have it in our granary." The husband said, "In that case, what am I to do ? It is really our hard luck." The wife replied, "Go and see if you can procure some from any of our neighbours." Her suggestion was enough for the husband to decide upon a plan. He took a rough woollen shawl round his body and went out.

Phoring saw the particular kind of paddy being thrashed in the house of a neighbour. He sat near the thrasher and began to talk with the owner on various topics of joy and sorrow. He sat there conversing for quite some time. The paddy was winnowed and gathered in a heap. At about this time, Phoring pretended as if he had a spasm of acute pain and began to roll upon the heap of paddy. When the grains stuck on to his shawl, he got up and groaned as he slowly headed towards his house. On reaching home, Phoring shook his shawl, and amassed a basketful of paddy. The wife was delighted and pounded it into powder after removing the husk. Phoring felt sleepy after dinner. So he went to bed. The wife made dozens of cakes and placed them neatly on a bamboo-tray. She ate most of the cakes and kept only a few in a bowl. While going to sleep, the wife woke up her husband and said to him, "Cakes have been baked. But let us come to an agreement. Tomorrow morning, whoever gets up early from the bed, will get to eat one-third of the cakes. And whoever gets up late will get the two-thirds." Phoring agreed to his wife's proposal and fell asleep.

Next morning, none of the two got up from their beds. The sun shone brightly but no one got up. Both pretended as if they were sleeping and snored. Finally, Phoring realized that he could not sleep for long leaving his work in the field. His wife shall have two-

thirds of the cakes and he would have only one-third. Thinking over this, he got up. When he was out of bed, the wife called out. You got up before me. As such, you will have only one-third and I will have the rest." The husband replied, "Alright, you shall have the two-thirds."

When Phoring went to eat the cakes, he found that there were only a few. He asked his wife, "Where are the other cakes ?" The wife replied, "Where from will the cakes come ? Whatever were being made are kept in the bowl. You eat one-third of it and leave the rest for me." In his mind, the husband thought it to be very surprising. How so few could be prepared from a basketful of paddy ? Suddenly he noticed the bamboo- tray which was hung on the wall. He saw the impression of the unbaked cakes on it. On counting the impressions, he found the number to be sixty. But he didn't say anything to his wife. He came out and sat outside. At about this time, his wife brought a plate with spices for him to chew. He took a little of it and began to sing a self-composed song suggesting her trick played in consuming the cakes.

When she understood the gist of her husband's song, she felt ashamed and left the place. She took a pitcher and went to the river to collect water. There on the bank of the river, she told her acquaintances about the incident of the cakes in detail. They said that her husband must be a 'fortune-teller'. As it is in the case with women, the news rolled from one to another so that soon it was known to the villagers that Phoring was a 'fortune-teller'.

In the meantime, a man lost his black cow. The owner of the cow searched for the cow for five days but could not find her. As he came to know that Phoring was a 'fortune-teller', he approached him for help. He asked him if he could give him some clue so that he might find out the lost cow. By chance, that morning, Phoring noticed that black cow grazing in a place full of tall grass behind his garden. So, Phoring said to him, "If you go in this way, behind the garden, you will find your cow."

The man did according to Phoring's advice and found the cow at the mentioned spot. The news that Phoring was an adept 'fortune-teller' got a wide publicity. The news even reached the king. Prior to this, a precious gold necklace disappeared from the royal chamber.

he donned.

One day, the king held a *seluk* (a kind of edible aquatic root) in his fist. He asked the 'fortune-teller', "What is here in my fist?" The 'fortune-teller' was taken aback and said, "*Sworgodeu, baarepoti soloku.*" ("Your Majesty, everytime I escape."). But the king heard it as, "*Burepoti seluk.*" (which means, the root at each dive). The king thought that the 'fortune-teller' had told about the *seluk* in his hand and gave him a lot of wealth and recognised him as the royal augurer.

Meanings :

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|-------------------------|--|
| <i>pitha</i> | : a cake made of powered rice. |
| <i>doi</i> | : curd. |
| <i>phoring</i> | : grass - hopper. |
| <i>seluk</i> | : a kind of edible aquatic root; the root of water- lily. |
| <i>Sworgodeu</i> | : a form of address to the Ahom (a certain clan) kings of Assam. |
| <i>baarepoti soloku</i> | : I escape repeatedly. |
| <i>baarepoti</i> | : repeatedly, again and again. |
| <i>soloku</i> | : to get through, to escape. |
| <i>burepoti</i> | : at each drive. |
| <i>Burepoti seluk</i> | : At each drive, I get a root of water-lily (<i>seluk</i>). |

THE TALE OF A SINGORA-FISH

One day a poor man went out for fishing. But at the end of the day, he did not get anything except a small *singora*-fish. He carried the fish home with the intention to eat it. As he was about to chop it, the *singora*-fish said aloud - "*Kokai*, I am the king of *singora*-fish. Do not kill me. I will always guard your cow." On hearing the *singora*, the man spared it. The next morning, he fed the *singora* and sent him to tend his cow. The *singora* rode on the cow's back and with the help of its stings, drove it out towards the field. Many days passed in this way. One day, when the *singora* took the cow to graze towards the forest, it saw a monster lying with its mouth open. On seeing the



On seeing the cow, the elated monster rose and was about to proceed.

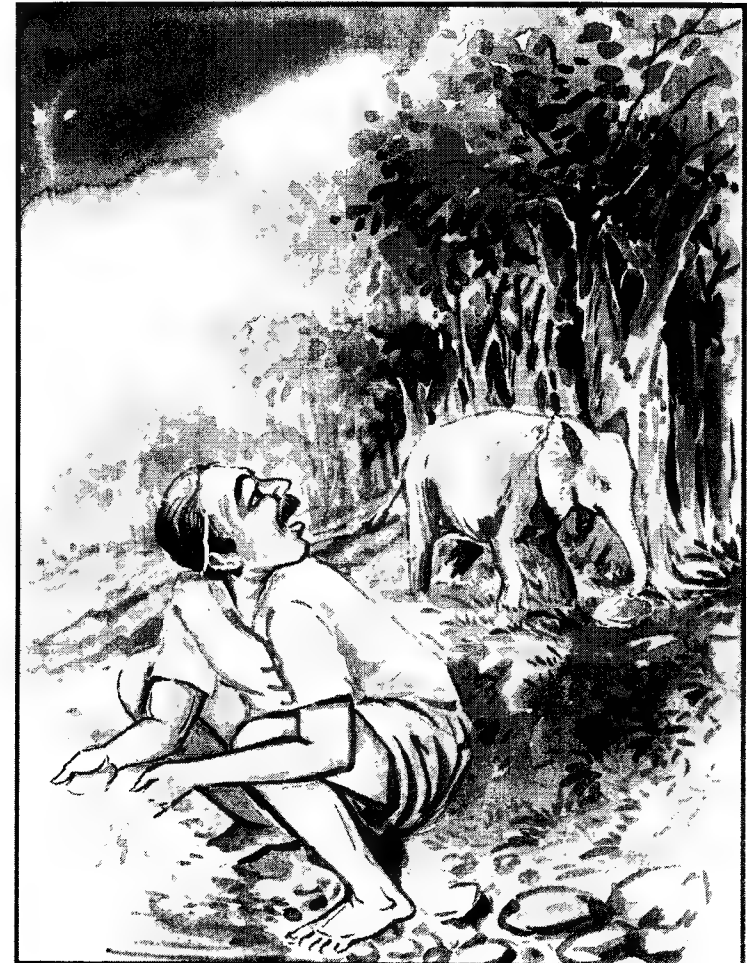
cow, the elated monster rose and was about to proceed when the *singora* stopped him by saying - "Hey Monster, wait ! Can't you see me? If you can over power me with your strength, then only you can touch my cow or else, you shall be done away with. The monster laughed at the words of the small fish. With the intention of crushing the *singora*, the monster took hold of it. But the fish pricked its poison-sting into the monster's hand. In his pain, the monster cried out, " I will give you whatever you want, so leave me." The fish said in reply, "If I should leave you, give me whatever you want to give me just now." The monster took out a golden ring from his stomach and said, "If you keep this ring on a banana-leaf and take care of it, your house would turn golden and, gold and silver would pile up under its influence." At the words of the monster, the *singora* withdrew its sting from his hand and drove the cow back home. On reaching home, it gave the ring to the farmer and told everything in detail. The elated owner did according to the words of the *singora* and his house turned golden. Gold and silver piled up in abundance. As a reward, the owner gave his daughter in marriage to the *singora*. Time passed on. But one day, the *singora* stole to the bank of the river. It put off its skin and turned into a man. As he was bathing, his wife caught sight of him. She quickly took the skin away and burnt it in fire. At this, the *singora* turned into a handsome youth. Henceforth, all in the family lived happily in royal grandeur.

Meanings :

- singora* : a kind of small fish.
Kokai : an elder brother, a cousin senior in age, a word used in addressing an elderly man.

A STRONG MAN

In a kingdom, there lived a huge elephant and a ferocious tiger. People were disgusted with their ravages. When the king could not kill the tiger and the elephant, he got it announced all throughout his kingdom that whoever would be able to kill the elephant and the tiger, would be showered with prizes. On hearing this, several people tried to kill the tiger and the elephant but failed. Incidentally, one day, a man in grief, with the intention of committing suicide, mixed poison with powdered rice and set out towards the kingdom. On his



At that time, the rogue elephant came and ate the powdered rice.

way, he placed the powder in a bundle beneath a tree and went to drink water from a nearby river. At that time, the rogue elephant came and ate the powdered rice. As soon as the elephant ate the poisoned powder, it died. When the king got this news, he inquired about the killer and the man was brought before him. When the king asked him how he killed the elephant, he said, "I killed the elephant with a single blow."

The king was highly pleased and gave the man a lot of wealth and said, "There is a furious tiger in my kingdom. If you can kill that beast, I will give you more riches". The man said, "Your Majesty, I can kill that tiger too."

The man was full of gratitude. On reaching home, he began to think of the probable means to kill the tiger. Though not at all free



The man began to sing out meaningless words.

from fear, one day the man carried a length of rope and a heavy club and entered the forest. There was a large tree in that forest. He climbed the tree and began to sing out meaningless sounds resembling the musical notes while the birds were chirping among the leaves. On hearing that, the tiger came near the tree and asked the man, "Uncle, what are you teaching the birds?" The man said, "Well, I am teaching them how to sing."

Then, the tiger said, "Uncle, will you teach me also how to sing such songs?" The man said, "You are a tiger, I am a human-being; won't you kill me?" At this, the tiger said, "I promise you three times over that I won't kill you. Teach me please how to sing." On hearing the tiger, the man scaled down the tree. He tied up the feet of the tiger and began to strike him with the club. In excruciating pain the tiger cried out, "Uncle, I won't learn how to sing, but leave me." The man said, "Learn it properly, won't you?" And the beating went on. Eventually, the tiger died. He dragged the tiger and showed it to the king. The delighted king said to him, "Today I will bring a strong man to fight with you. If you can win over him, I will give you even more riches." Saying this, the king brought a strong man and made him sleep with that person. The man said to the strong man, "Brother, I have killed an elephant with a single blow and have killed a big tiger. How dare you fight with me? Why have you come to fight me and die in this young age?" Being terrified, the strong man ran away. However, in the morning, when the king did not find the strong man, he gave the other man a lot of riches and bade him farewell. From then onwards, the ravages of the elephant and the tiger were got rid of and peace prevailed in the kingdom.

THE TALE OF THE KITE'S DAUGHTER

In a country, there lived a potter. He had a lot of riches. But he had no son. Whenever his wife was pregnant, she delivered a baby-girl. At this, the potter was always in a sad mood. After some time, when his wife conceived again, he said to her "If you beget a girl this time too, I will sell you in the *Naga* Market." Hearing this, the wife was terrified. As the date of delivery approached, the potter's wife went to her mother's place. But unfortunately, she gave birth to a baby-girl again. She trembled in fear. So, before her husband came to know, she quickly put the baby in an earthen cooking-pot, covered it with old clothes, put a lid on and floated it in the river.

The pot drifted along the river. At that time, a washerman



A washerman opened the lid and saw the new-born baby-girl.

washing clothes noticed the pot. In order to see what lay inside it, he swam upto the pot and on opening the lid, he saw the new-born baby-girl. The washerman decided to adopt her. He removed the lid, caught hold of the pot and began to swim slowly towards the shallow waters. As he was doing so, suddenly a kite caught hold of the baby from the pot and flew away. The kite had her nest on a tall tree. She kept the baby there. On seeing the little baby-girl, she was overcome by affection. As such, she decided to bring up the baby.

Everyday the kite would pounce on whatever good food she could find and bring it to feed the girl. Thus the kite gradually brought her up. If the kite saw some fine apparel dried in the sun



The girl grew up on the branch of a tree.

in any house - hold, she would seize them and bring for her daughter to wear. One day, a princess put off her ornaments on the river-bank before going to take a bath. The kite immediately pounced on the ornaments and brought them for her daughter. In this way, she brought comb, mirror, and a variety of cosmetics for her daughter to use.

Gradually, the girl grew up on the branch of the tree and in beauty, she looked like a fairy. One day, the kite said to her, "*My dear daughter*, now you are a grown-up. Everyday I go out to long distances leaving you alone. As such, I am very worried about your safety. From today onwards, whenever you are afraid or need me instantly, you call me immediately in this way -

" The leaves move in the breeze,

Mother kite come to me."

At this, I will fly quickly and appear before you. One afternoon, the kite's daughter was combing her hair while she was sitting on a branch of the tree. At about that time, a merchant who was passing that way felt tired in the sunshine and sat under the tree to take rest. There was no human-being in that place. A hair flew from somewhere and fell on his lap. He was surprised to see it and picked it up. As it was quite long, he measured it. The hair was seven feet in length. The merchant looked to all directions and wondered as to where from the hair could have come. At that moment, he looked up towards the tree. He saw a beautiful girl combing her hair on a branch of the tree. The merchant was surprised and asked aloud - "Who are you ? A god or a human being ? Or a fairy ? Or a female demon, tell me about you ? Why are you sitting on the branch in this afternoon?". Prior to this, the girl had never seen a human being. As such, the frightened girl could not decide what to say in reply and called out to her mother as being instructed.

As soon as she called out, the kite flew from somewhere and appeared before her daughter immediately. When she asked about the reason for her call, the daughter pointed her finger towards the man. When the kite saw the young and handsome merchant, she thought that if he turned out to be a good man, she would give her daughter in marriage to him. Thinking so, the kite came down and told everything about her daughter in detail to the merchant. The

merchant said to the kite, "I have a lot of riches. I am a wealthy man. But I have seven wives now. As such, if you give your daughter in marriage to me without any resentment, I assure you that I will keep her happy and content. I will never let grief befall on her." On hearing the merchant's words, she thought over several times before agreeing to his proposal. She explained her daughter much and brought her down and entrusted her to the merchant. The kite cried as she pleaded him not to cause sorrow to the girl. And she also said to her daughter, "Dear one, whenever you need me, call me in the manner I have taught and I will appear before you."

Thus, the merchant brought the kite's daughter to his house and kept her with love and care. But on seeing her beauty, the other wives thought that on finding such a beautiful wife, the merchant would be weary of them. Thinking so, the seven of them grew jealous of the kite's daughter and began to inflict pain on her.

One day, the seven wives got together and said to the kite's daughter, " Do you think yourself to be a beautiful fairy ? Are we to do all the household work and cook for you to sit and eat ? Go, today you shall prepare the meal." She had never cooked in her life. As such, being unable to prepare rice and on finding no other means, she cried and went to the banana grove in the backyard. Sitting there, she wailed out to her mother -

"Banana leaves dance in the breeze,

Mother Kite appear before me."

As soon as she called out like this, the kite came and appeared before her. She asked her daughter, "What has happened ? Why did you call for me ?" At this, the daughter said, "Mother, the other wives of my husband have told me to prepare rice. I don't know how to cook. If I don't cook, they will speak against me to my husband and I don't know else what they may ask me to do." On hearing her daughter's words, the mother said, "Dear, don't be afraid of anything. Listen to me as I tell you how to prepare rice. Take an earthen cooking-pot and fill it up with water. Throw a grain of rice into it. Fill another cooking-pot with water and throw a single piece of any vegetable into it. Then place fire-wood beneath the cooking-pots and

come out of the kitchen and sit outside. You will see inexhaustible amount of rice and curry in the pots." With this advice to her daughter, the kite flew away. The daughter acted accordingly. At meal time each of the other wives dug a hole under their plates. As soon as the kite's daughter served rice on their plates, they used to throw it into the hole and call out for more. In this way, the kite's daughter served the other wives as many times as they asked for more. At last, they had to leave the place with the sense of shameful defeat.

One day, the other wives told the kite's daughter to clean up the cow-shed. She entered the cow-shed and called out to her mother like earlier.

As soon as she called out in this manner, the kite came and appeared before her. When she asked the reason behind calling out to her, the daughter said, "Mother, the other wives of my husband have told me to clean up the cow-shed. I have called you to tell me how to clean it." The mother said, "Just sweep the broom once from one side of the shed to the other. You will see that the place would become spick and span." Saying this, as her mother flew away, the daughter did accordingly and, the cowshed sparkled in cleanliness like never before. On seeing such a fine work of the kite's daughter, the merchant grew all the more fond of her.

As *Bohag Bihu* (the spring festival and New Year's day celebrated in Assam) approached, the merchant gave each of his eight wives enough cotton and said, "You all weave requisite cloth for my garments and *gamosas* to be worn in this New Year. And I will see who weaves the best." Each of the seven wives began to prepare the cotton for spinning. But the kite's daughter sat cheerlessly as she didn't know anything about spinning and weaving. The other wives thought that the kite's daughter was in trouble. She didn't know anything. How could she weave clothes for her husband? The kite's daughter went to the backyard and wailed out to her mother as before. At this, the kite appeared before her daughter and asked her, "What is the matter? Why have you called me?" When the daughter told about the matter of weaving clothes, the kite said to her, "Well my dear, don't worry. You will be able to give clothes to your husband. Keep a boll of cotton in each of the four bamboo-tubes and cover their mouths with a stopper. Then you bring the

tubes and hand them over to your husband." Saying this, the kite flew away. The daughter did what her mother advised. The other wives of the merchant went on with their task of weaving. On seeing the cotton being kept aside by the kite's daughter, they were delighted at heart and thought, "This time our lady is trapped. If the kite's daughter is unable to weave clothes, the merchant will not excuse her."

On the occasion of the New Year's day, the seven wives gave their respective woven clothes to their husband. But the kite's daughter merely handed over four bamboo-tubes to him. The other wives of the merchant laughed aloud at this. The merchant asked the kite's daughter angrily, "What are these that you are giving me? Where are the clothes?" She said, "Just open the bamboo-tubes and have a look." When the merchant opened the tubes, beautiful items of dress fell out. And they were of such fine quality that those of the other wives's appeared to be rags compared to them.

As such, the merchant tore the other clothes into pieces before throwing them away and wore those given by the kite's daughter.

Gradually, the other wives of the merchant came to know that a kite comes to tell her the means to overcome difficult situations. Knowing this, they planned to kill the kite. One of them lay in wait to hear how the kite's daughter called out for her mother and learnt it. One day, she entered the cow-shed and called out like the kite's daughter. At that, the kite came and appeared before her. At that moment, she struck the kite hard with a broom and killed it. Then, she buried it beneath cow-dung. The kite's daughter didn't get the slightest clue about the matter. After this, the kite's daughter wailed out to her mother several times, but, where from would she come? Then the kite's daughter understood that the other wives of the merchant had conspired and killed her mother. She cried unconsolably.

A few days later, the merchant got ready to go for trade. At the time of departure, he cautioned his seven wives not to cause sorrow to the kite's daughter and to take care of her.

One day, a trader who brought combs, mirrors, vermilion, perfumed oil and various items of cosmetic goods, tied his boat at the merchant's landing place. The other wives of the merchant conspired to sell the kite's daughter to the trader. They took some

goods from him and told him that in exchange they would give him a beautiful girl. They described about the beauty and quality of the girl in such a manner that he agreed to their offer. The other wives told the kite's daughter, "A trader has a boatful of goods to sell at our bank. Lets go and buy some items from him." The kite's daughter said, "Sisters, I don't want anything. You all may go, I will stay back. My husband has told me not to go anywhere". As they continued to ask her to come along with them again and again, she finally agreed hesitatingly. Under the pretext of seeing the goods, they made her get into the boat. According to the plan hatched by the trader along with the wives, he suddenly untied the boat and went away taking with him the kite's daughter.

The trader took her home. There he made her a keeper of dried fish. As the kite's daughter sat under the sun guarding the dried fish, she wailed out in this way ----

The potter's wife drifted me away.

Mother kite lifted me.

The prince of merchants married me.

His seven other wives sold me to a fish-monger.

And he made me a keeper of dried fish.

As the kite's daughter was wailing while guarding the fish, the merchant was going upstream in his boat towards home by that way. On hearing the wail from a distance, he stopped his boat there and went to the kite's daughter. When he asked the reason behind her wailing, she told everything to him in detail. Then he made her board his boat, bathed her, dressed her in new clothes and brought her with him. The merchant hid the kite's daughter in a wooden chest and made a hole in it for her to breathe. On reaching home, alongwith his other goods, the merchant kept the chest in his room. When he saw the seven wives, he asked them, "I can see all of you; but why do I not find the kite's daughter ?" They answered, "It has been days since she went to her mother's place.

But she has not returned yet." On hearing this, the merchant said, "I feel that you all have done something to her. Alright, to see whether you are speaking the truth or telling a lie to me, I will put

you to test now." Saying so, he got dug a deep pit and planted leafless thorny branches in it. After that, he tied a fresh thread from one end of the pit to the other. Then he said to his wives, "Those who can crawl across this thread would be known to be guiltless." One by one the six wives fell into the pit and died as the thread broke while they went across it. But the seventh one didn't fall. She went across the thread seven times but the thread remained intact. That was because she didn't know anything about the sale of the kite's daughter to the trader. When the other wives were doing that, she was busy cooking.

The merchant then buried those six wives in that pit itself and brought out the kite's daughter from the chest. Finally, he settled down in peace and happiness with the kite's daughter and his seventh wife.

Meanings :

Naga : The generic name of a tribe inhabiting certain hills in the eastern-most part of North-East India.

Bihu : Harvest festival of Assam.

Gamosa : a towel, a napkin.

TULA AND TEJA

A rich farmer had two wives. The elder one was *Aelaagee* (alienated) and, the younger one was *Laagee* (favourite). Aelaagee had a daughter named *Teja* and a son named *Kanai*. Laagee had a daughter called *Tula*. Laagee inflicted sorrow on Aelaagee and her children. The hen-pecked husband also didn't dare to love them as he was afraid of Laagee. They were deprived of good food and clothes. In the morning, Teja and Kanai used to eat stale rice soaked in water as food. Then they went to graze cows. On the other hand, Tula and her mother enjoyed rich food and wore fine clothes. They led a happy life. In the afternoon, when the husband returned home for lunch, Laagee used to serve him a hot meal comprising rice, curry, vegetables, fries and roasted meat. But sometimes, Aelaagee pleaded her husband to have food at her place. She used to serve him cold rice soaked in water and grilled fish. As he was afraid of Laagee, he used to eat in secret but with great relish. Infact, at noon, after ploughing, he enjoyed eating cold rice and grilled fish more than the hot lunch of rice and curry prepared by Laagee. Laagee came to notice that slowly her husband has started to eat his lunch frequently at Aelaagee's place. As such, she tried to invent means in order to do away with Aelaagee.

One day, Laagee called out Aelaagee in order to go for fishing. Laagee could catch only crabs, snails and such sort of aquatic creatures. Whereas, Aelaagee could catch a variety of large fish. Seeing this, Laagee was extremely annoyed with Aelaagee. After fishing, both of them went to a bamboo bridge on a big pond in order to bathe. Laagee said to Aelaagee, "Sister, scrub my back well. It is full of dirt. After mine is over, I will scrub your's." Aelaagee started scrubbing as proposed. After hers was over, Laagee started to scrub Aelaagee's back. As she was doing so, she uttered magic incantation saying, "Become a big turtle", and pushed Aelaagee into the water. Then, she trampled on the fishing implement of Aelaagee, threw it away into the forest and returned home. No one saw this nor anyone came to know about the incident. When Aelaagee's children didn't see her, they asked Laagee, "Aunty, have you seen our mother?" She replied them curtly, "How can I say that ? Does your mother ask my permission before going out ?" As the husband was afraid of Laagee, he didn't investigate into Aelaagee's absence. He thought she might have died somewhere. Being unable to find their mother, the children kept crying. That morning, they went out

to graze the cows as they would be subjected to Laagee's scolding and beating if they didn't do so.

Thus they went on grazing the cattle with a heavy heart. One day, they felt very thirsty and went to that pond to drink water. As it was high noon, the surrounding was quiet and there was no sign of any person out there. At that time, their mother --- the big turtle, came up to the shallow water and called out to them, "My dear Teja and Kanai, your aunt has turned me into a turtle by pushing me into the pond. Your faces seem to be emaciated; you have not eaten enough. I have brought sweetened rice from the fairy of the pond. Bring a leaf of arum and have it. But don't tell about this to anyone. If your aunt comes to know, she will kill me. I shall give you sweetened rice everyday. You come and eat." Following their mother's words, they brought two leaves, placed the food on them and began to eat with



Teja and Kanai brought two arum leaves to have food given by the big turtle, their mother.

relish. Towards the evening, grazing was over and they returned home. They used to eat sweetened rice daily and became healthy. Observing their lively appearance, Laagee thought, "I don't give them enough to eat. But then they are growing healthier day by day. The complexion of their faces look so bright. Though I feed Tula with the best food, she has not the brightness in her looks as they have in theirs. What may be the reason behind this? They must be eating something somewhere while they are out grazing." Thinking so, the next day she sent Tula along with them to graze the cows. She also told her in secret to keep an eye on what they ate. That day, Teja, Kanai and their mother; the turtle, faced great inconvenience because Tula followed Teja and Kanai wherever they went. Once, Teja tactfully told Tula to bring a cow from a distance which had gone astray. As soon as Tula went to accomplish the task, the turtle came out and went away after providing food to her children. They too hurriedly finished eating and threw away the leaves. Just about that time, Tula noticed them eating something from a distance. She rushed towards them and said, "What did you eat? I entreat you to give me too." Not being able to avoid her request, they told her, "There is nothing left now. Alright, you can lick that leaf but, don't tell your mother about this. If you tell her, we will never give you to eat in future." Tula picked up the leaves and began to lick them. That day, when Tula returned home, her mother could see that the complexion of her face resembled that of a ripe orange. She understood that her daughter ate something along with them. She hurriedly called her inside and asked, "Tell me what did you eat with them?" But Tula would not answer. At last, her mother frightened her by telling her that she would smear her eyes with hot chilly. So, she confessed everything to her mother. Then she realized that it was the other wife of her husband, now in the form of a turtle, who had been providing her children with something to eat. As she realized this, she made a plan to kill the turtle. She kept some broken pieces of earthen-ware beneath her sleeping mattress and lay there pretending as if she was ill. When her husband asked her several times, she tossed from one side to the other and the broken pieces made a cracking sound. Finally, she said, "I am extremely ill. My bones are cracking. I am about to die." On seeing his wife's condition, the husband was frightened and called for an old woman who was a diviner. He wanted the old woman to prescribe some remedy for her malady as well as to fore-tell her future. Laagee had already bribed the woman to tell that she would get well soon after having the flesh of the big turtle

in the pond. According to the advice of the old woman, he asked the villagers to help in catching the turtle in the pond. They went out taking a variety of fishing traps along with them. As they were aware of the impending doom, the children went quietly to their mother --- the turtle. They cried bitterly as they delivered the news to her before the people arrived. The mother told them, "I won't be caught by anyone. When they get tired and give up, you come with a net with holes. I shall enter into it. But when I shall be killed and my meat



The children went quietly to their mother – the 'turtle', in order to inform her.

would be served to you, donot eat. That day, you take a plain meal of rice and salt. You ask the person who chops the turtle to give you the two fore-legs of mine. Then you bury them on the bank of the pond. There I shall grow into a plant of china-rose. It will provide you succour in troubled times." Thus explaining, the mother sent them away.

With the intention of catching the turtle, the villagers descended to the water in the pond. In the process of trying to catch the turtle, the water became turbid. At last, they returned to the bank as they felt tired. At this, Teja and Kanai took the net with holes in it and said to the people, "We can catch the turtle." The people laughed at their venture and said, "Alright, the two small children wish to catch the turtle. Let's see how they do it." Teja caught the turtle with the least effort. The people were surprised at that.

On the other hand, when Laagee heard that the turtle had been caught, she sat up on her bed saying that she was feeling well. While the turtle was being cut in the courtyard, the children asked the chopper for the two fore-legs. They got them and quietly buried the legs on the bank of the pond. The people enjoyed the feast alongwith turtle-meat. But, Tula and Teja buried the meat in the hole they had already dug under their plates. Instead, they asked for rice and salt.

Two plants, one bearing orange and the other blooming with china-rose grew on the spot where the two legs were buried. Teja and Kanai went out as usual to graze the cows every morning. They used to rest under the plants and talk with their mother.

One day, the king of that country happened to pass that way alongwith his followers. He noticed the two luxuriant plants. He wished to have some oranges and adorn himself with a few beautiful flowers. So, he stopped there and sent his minister to fetch some flowers and fruits. As he came closer, the children said, "The fruits and the flowers are ours We may give some if the king himself comes to ask for them." On the report of his minister and seeing the beautiful pair of children, the king was charmed and came down from the palenquin. When the king approached, Kanai knelt down to pay obeisance and said, "If Your Majesty marries my sister Teja, then only we shall give His Majesty the orange and the flowers." The king was fascinated by the beauty of the girl. As such, he said, "Alright, I shall marry your sister. But, at present, she is only a girl. When she comes of age, I will marry and take her with me." Teja had been rearing a young *mynah*. She always carried the bird alongwith her while grazing the cattle and fed it with



The king sent his minister to fetch some flowers and fruits.

insects, ants and grass-hoppers. Proffering a sapling of pomegranate and the *mynah* to the king, Kanai said, "As we are poor, His Majesty may forget us. So, this pomegranate-sapling and the *mynah* are presented to His Majesty for kind acceptance. When pomegranates ripen on the tree and the *mynah* begins to imitate human voice, then Your Majesty will have to come, marry Teja and take her away." The king agreed and left for his capital with fruits, flowers, the pomegranate-sapling and the *mynah*. What Kanai told the king had already been tutored by his mother. On arrival at the palace, the king planted the pomegranate-sapling near his bed-room and kept the *mynah* in a golden cage which he hung above the porch.

Time moved on. The pomegranate-sapling grew and began to bear fruits which ripened in due course. On the other hand, Teja grew up to be a beautiful maiden. The *mynah* also started to utter sounds and was able to speak like human-beings. But still, the king failed to remember Teja. One day the king was taking rest in his drawing-room after his meal. At about that time, the *mynah* called out ----

"The trees have shed their leaves,
The pomegranate also ripens,
The *mynah* has learnt to sing.
What a forgetful King !
To fail to remember Teja."

The king looked around. Finding no one near about, he kept on sitting. Again, the *mynah* called out as before.

Hearing the verse for the second time, the king remembered Teja instantly. He went up and looked at the pomegranate tree. He saw ripe fruits on it. It was then that the king dressed up and went alongwith his attendants to marry Teja and bring her with him. But the king went without informing his queen about his journey. When the king had gone out, the queen asked her old maid-servant, "Do you know where the king has gone ?" The old maid replied, "Yes, I know. It is you who donot know what the king does and where he goes. But we know. To tell you my Lady, the king has gone to bring another wife. I have heard that a rich farmer has a daughter by the name of Teja. The king has gone to bring her." On hearing the words of the old maid, the queen started crying loudly. The old maid consoled her and said, "Please donot cry. Listen to my plan. Tomorrow when the king comes alongwith Teja and brings the boat to the bank of the river, just sit there and obstruct Teja's entry. Donot let her alight anywhere on the bank. In case she alights and comes ashore, don't lose heart. Your next strategy will be to plant two banana-saplings just at the doorway. Cut the trunks near the bottom in such a way that they keep standing but, fall at the touch of Teja's clothes. Cut the joints of the door-frame in such a way that it parts and falls apart as soon as Teja touches it. Break the legs stool in such a way that as soon as Teja sits on it, the stool breaks with a crash. Break the legs of the bed-stead too in such a manner that no sooner the king goes to lie on it alongwith Teja than it breaks away. If you can do these, the king would regard Teja to be a cursed woman and drive her out."

The queen did according to the old maid's instruction. On the other hand, the king went and married Teja. She lamented as she asked her father for a handome dowry to which she is entitled.

When Teja was lamenting, her step-mother said curtly, "I won't even give you a piece of straw." After that, the king returned to his palace alongwith Teja. At the time of departure, she was so sad that she did not talk to anyone except to her brother. She brought him alongwith her.

Without looking back, Teja proceeded to depart. When she moved out without looking back, all the things belonging to her father started to follow her. The father was wonder-struck at the phenomenon. Just then, he lamented as he called out to Teja ----

"O my dear Teja,
look back just once.
O my lovely Teja,
look back just once.

Hearing the lamentation of her father, Teja looked askance. At that, one fourth of the things stayed back at her father's house, the rest three fourths came alongwith Teja. That is why even today, when a daughter is married and leaves with the groom, she looks back at her parents. If one does not do so, it is said that all the things in her parental home move out alongwith her.

According to the instruction of the old maid, the queen went and sat on the boat's mooring site. When Teja's boat drew near the landing place, the queen called out -

"Do not land here, cursed Teja,
this is the king's bathing place"

So, the boat moved to another landing place in order to drop anchor. But the queen called out again -

"Do not land here, ill-fated Teja,
this is where the royal robes are washed."

Thus, the queen continued to hinder Teja from alighting on land. Meanwhile, the king arrived. On seeing him, Teja lamented as she said ----

"Listen to me, O King,
Your Queen calls me 'cursed' Teja."

The king said ----

"Let her call you cursed
you will be the Chief - Queen,
while I shall be the King."

Saying this, the king alighted from his boat and brought Teja through the site where he used to bathe. On reaching the gate leading to the palace, Teja stood under the banana-saplings. As soon as she brushed past the saplings, they fell flat on the ground. The queen called out at that ----

"Where from have you come, cursed Teja ?
Just on arriving, you have felled the banana-saplings."

After that, no sooner had Teja entered the house and touched the door than the frame came down. The queen called out ----

"Where from have you come, cursed Teja ?
Just on arriving, you have broken the door."

After this, as soon as Teja sat on the large stool, its legs gave way and the queen called out ----

"Where from have you come, cursed Teja ?
Just on arriving, you have broken the stool."

At night, when Teja went to sleep on the bed, its legs broke down. Hearing the sound of the breaking of the bed, the queen called out --

"Where from have you come, cursed Teja ?
Just on arriving, you have broken the legs of the bed."

Teja felt very sad at the caustic remarks of the queen and lamented as she told the king ----

"Listen to me, O king !
The Queen calls me 'cursed' Teja."

The king understood that those were the pranks of the queen. Disregarding the issue, he said to Teja ----

"Let her call you cursed Teja,
you will be the Chief-Queen, while I shall be the King."

After this, Teja graced the king's palace as the queen. On the other hand, her step-mother became restless out of envy as, Teja had become the queen and her daughter Tula could not be her equal. Therefore, the step-mother thought of a plan and one day, she went to the king's palace. In the presence of the king, she showered affected love on Teja and said, "It has been a long time since the girl has visited her parents.

She must be very eager to go on a visit. Day and night, the father keeps himself engaged in cultivation but does not bother about family-affairs. Not being able to see the girl, I was always suffering from anguish. As such, I have come myself to take her for a few days." Hearing the words of Teja's step mother, the king sent Teja alongwith her. The step-mother and Teja reached home. At the time of departure, Teja left a loom which was kept ready for weaving.

Although the step-mother treated Teja with a show of love and care, she hatched a plot to do away with her.

Instigated by her mother, one day Tula said to Teja, "Dear sister, the ornaments been given to you by the King are so beautiful that I feel like wearing at least for once." The unsuspecting Teja gave her ornaments to Tula to wear without hesitation. Meanwhile, the step-mother came close to Teja and said to her, "Dear, come, let me brush and dress your hair." Saying so, she made Teja sit and acted as if she was dressing her hair. Suddenly she took a small steel-pin and chanted some magic words over it. Then she thrust it on her head and said, "You turn into a *salika*." Just then, Teja turned into a *salika* (a kind of small bird) and flew to perch on the roof of the house.

The next day after this incident, the king sent his men with a palenquin to bring Teja back. But, the crafty mother dressed Tula in Teja's clothes and ornaments and sent her to the king's palace. Tula resembled Teja in appearance to a great extent. As such, the king could not notice much difference. And whatever little change was observed, the king considered that to be the result of Teja's unrestricted way of living at her mother's. The *salika* too flew alongwith the royal palenquin and the king's men. The bird built it's nest on the roof of the king's palace.

When Teja went to her parental home, she left behind a loom with silk yarns which she had just started to weave. Now, Tula had to finish the work. But Tula was not an adept weaver. One day, as Tula sat at the loom to weave, she couldn't make any progress and her mishandling resulted only in messing up the whole lot of yarn. On seeing that, the *salika* came down flying and perched on the roof of the shed where the loom was placed. She said ----

"Don't tear ! Don't break my loom !
Leave and keep it sound."

The king was sitting near. He wondered what could the *salika* mean as he didn't understand. So he kept silent.

Another day, after having lunch, the king was playing at dice with Tula. At about this time, the *salika* came flying, perched at a distance and called out ----

"O King ! What has fascinated you ?

You have been playing at dice with your sister-in-law."

At first, the king didn't pay any attention to the *salika*'s chattering and concentrated on the game. But, the bird called out in the same way again ----

"O King ! What has fascinated you ?

You have been playing at dice with your sister-in-law."

The strange behaviour of the bird perplexed the king and he thought over it for a while. He got up slowly and went inside. Then came out with a cake signifying hunger in one hand and, a cake signifying thirst in the other. Then he looked at the bird and said, "If you are someone else, then you will come flying and take away the cake signifying thirst from my hand. And, if you are a relative of mine, you shall come and eat the cake signifying hunger on my hand itself." When the king said so, the bird came flying, perched on the king's hand and started to eat the cake signifying hunger. He caressed the bird. As he was doing so, his finger touched some rough object on its head. When the king observed the object closely, he found it to be a small steel-pin. No sooner had the king pulled it out, than the mynah transformed into Teja. As the king was struck with wonder, he was impatient to know from Teja the facts behind the mystery that engulfed his mind. She narrated all that happened after she had left the palace with her step-mother.

In his fury, the king ordered the hang-man to chop Tula into pieces. He asked him to encase her flesh in a wicker-basket, her head and limbs in another, and her fats in a bottle. Then he told the hang-man to produce those before him for his inspection.

The king's order was carried out. The two wicker-baskets and the bottle of fats were sent to the house of Tula's mother with the help of two men. He instructed them to tell there that, the king had sent venison in the wicker-basket for his wife's relatives. He asked them to keep the basket containing her head and limbs with them for the night. Next day, before dawn they were to place the other basket at the door-step and come back.

On presentation of the basket, Teja's step-mother was overjoyed

and she said to herself, "My daughter has sent me a gift so soon. And the other one never sent me even a piece of straw."

At night, Tula's mother and all others in the family had a meal comprising the meat to their heart's content and lighted earthen-lamps with the fats sent in the bottle. That night the two men of the king went to bed without having any food. Tula's mother pressed them to have something to eat. But they refused saying that they were suffering from high fever. On the other hand, when all finished their dinner, the two men started to sing a song from their bed-room which purports to consumption of kinsman's flesh by kinsmen and lighting of lamps with kinsman's fats. Persons perpetrating such deeds are doomed to endless affliction.

Tula's mother asked them, "What are you singing ?" They replied, "Madam, under the affect of high fever, we are not aware of what we are singing."

Next morning, on getting up from bed, Tula's mother found that the two men of the king had left and, a wicker-basket was lying on the door-step. As she opened the basket, she found the head and limbs of Tula in it which she recognised in no time. She realized on whose flesh they had feasted on the previous night and started to cry helplessly.

Meanings :

- Aelaagee* : not liked by one's husband, a superseded wife.
- Laagee* : beloved, favourite (as a wife).
- mynah* : a kind of small 'singing' bird.
- salika* : a kind of small, dark-coloured bird.

TIT FOR TAT

A king had seven sons. All of them were married. Every evening the seven wives used to sit together and spin thread, and talk till it was time or dinner.



The seven wives used to sit together and spin thread.

The spring festival of *Bihu* approached. On the occasion of the New Year's Day, it was customary to present new clothes for their husbands. Relatives and attendants had to be pleased too. As such, they began to weave in great haste.

One day, as they went on with their work, the wives talked about visiting their maternal homes in the wake of the ensuing festival. But the youngest wife kept quiet. She didn't utter a word and sighed. Seeing that, the second wife said affectionately, "I will take her to my mother's place." But the youngest wife said, "Sister, I will stay here with our mother-in-law." Hearing that, the eldest princess said, "Why don't you go? You have no parents or siblings. We shall be leaving for our maternal homes. Will you stay here alone? What can you do when you have been orphaned by fate? Why should you be being sad? We shall feel bad to leave you here alone."

Bohag Bihu arrived. It was *Uruka*. All and sundry were impatient for the festivity to begin. In the afternoon, a well-built man came to the king's premises and said to the queen, "Madam, I have come to take home my dear sister." Surprised, the queen asked, "Whom?" He answered, "It's your youngest daughter-in-law." The queen said, "She has no relatives. Where from have you turned up?" He answered, "Madam, when I was a child, I left my parents and went to stay with my maternal uncle. But at their death, I brought all the articles from my home and settled in my uncle's village. Since it's *Bihu* tomorrow, I have come to take my sister. Where is she?" The queen replied, "She is inside. She would be coming out now. It is very nice if your words are true. All my other daughters-in-law have left for their maternal homes. I was feeling sad for her since she had no one to visit."

When the youngest wife came out she, was astonished to hear about the man from her mother-in-law. By no means she was ready to believe that she had an elder brother and refused to go with him. But the man had already won the confidence of the queen. The youngest daughter-in-law was forced to go with the 'brother'.

The two went on for a long time and entered a forest. They reached a house there. He took her in and said, "This is my house. We shall get married tomorrow. Now you have some food and stay here." Saying so, he called an old woman and said, "Mother, you look after her. I am going out to gather the things

required for the marriage." It was now that the wife realized that she had been tricked by a thief. She was frightened. On feeling dizzy, she sat down. At this, the old woman said, "Get up, my daughter. Don't be afraid. You needn't be sad. You would be more happy in my son's house than at the king's palace. Now have your meal." Hearing the old woman's words, the wife gathered courage and said, "Who are you?" She replied, "I am his mother. We are wealthy and belong to a good family. He has filled the house with riches and gold accumulated by robbing in villages and towns. But he is not yet settled. That day he went to steal at the king's palace. There he poked his nose into a hole in the wall and over-heard your discussion. It seems you cried saying that you had no one. So he brought you here. He wants to marry you. He has gone to the village today in order to bring the required items for the marriage. He would return by tomorrow. Don't be sad. You shall be very happy." Thus she explained her and brought her rice. But the youngest wife didn't even touch the food. At night, she stayed along with the old woman. As soon as morning set in, she got up slowly and tied up the woman with a rope to the bed-stead. Next she brought a smart horse from the stable, mounted it and escaped. On the way, she saw a man sitting under a tree. When the man saw the figure from a distance, he thought it to be that of the king's soldier approaching on a horse. He jumped up at once and entered the forest. On reaching the tree, the youngest wife saw some gold ornaments lying on the ground. The man left them there in a hurry. She picked them up and rode off to the king's palace. When she related her story, all were struck dumb.

On reaching home, the man found that his to-be 'bride' had escaped. He untied his mother and left for the king's town. In the evening, when the youngest wife was talking with her mother-in-law, he poked his nose into the hole again in order to listen to their conversation. The clever wife came to know about it. While he was busy eaves-dropping, she rose slowly from her seat and, brought a razor and a bowl of *kharonee* (a solution of alkaline potash). Taking the razor, she rushed and cut the part of his nose that was seen poking out of the wall. Then she poured the solution of alkaline potash on the amputated organ and said, "*Kota juwa naak kharonee di dhaak.*" ("Cover the amputated nose with alkaline potash.")



The king's soldiers rushed in and caught the thief.

As the thief cried out in pain, the king's soldiers rushed in and caught him. When the youngest wife reported to the king that the same fellow was the thief who cheated her, His Majesty sentenced him to be put to the stake.

Meanings:-

Bohag Bihu

: the harvest festival of Assam celebrated in the first month of the Assamese New Year (i.e., *Bohag*).

kharonee

: a solution of alkaline potash.

Kota juwa naak kharonee do dhaak : cover the amputated nose with alkaline potash.

TEEKHOR AND SUTI-BAI

In a certain village, there lived a couple of orphaned children. The boy was known as *Teekhor* and the girl was called *Suti-bai*. Since childhood, the boy was of sharp intellect. So, the villagers named him *Teekhor*. As the girl was of small stature, she was named *Suti - bai*. They grew up in great misery as destitutes.

One day, Teekhor also wanted to have some rice-cakes (*pitha*) as he saw people enjoying it as a sweet delicacy. He said to his sister about his desire. At this, she said, "Well Brother, although



"Well brother, although you want, where will you get rice-cakes?"

you want, where will you get it ? God has deprived us of all joys, or else, why our parents died when we were little ones ? Somehow we manage to get vegetables and rice for our meals; where shall we find the proper paddy to prepare cakes ? Where from shall we procure oil and molasses?"

Hearing his sister's words, Teekhor thought for sometime and said, "Suti-bai, give me the coarse woollen shawl. I am going out to bring the paddy just now." Saying this, Teekhor wrapped the shawl round his body and went out.

Teekhor happened to see one of his neighbours thrashing the particular variety of paddy in his courtyard. He approached him and cracked trifling jokes and made him laugh. At that time, Teekhor said that he felt thirsty. As soon as the man went in to bring a pot of water, he started rolling over the paddy. When the man came back, he saw that the boy was rolling all over the paddy. He asked, "Teekhor, what has happened to you



Teekhor shook the shawl and showed the heap of grain to his sister.

" Teekhor groaned as he answered, "I am dying of a wrenching pain in my stomach. What to do ? Where to go ?" The man went in again in order to bring some oil to rub on Teekhor's belly. At this, Teekhor called out loudly, " I am going home. I will die if I stay here." Then he got up and ran home. On reaching home, he shook the shawl and showed the heap of grain to his sister. At this, she was also elated. She said, "We have the grain, but what about oil ?" Teekhor said, "Alright, give me a small earthen jar." When she gave him one, he took it and went out again. He stopped near a house where a farmer was extracting oil. He asked him, "Shall I get on the oil press?" More pressure will make the oil to flow out quickly." The farmer said, "You may mount if you want to. Afterall, what is the harm ?" As soon as Teekhor got up the press, he started to sing.

Teekhor had a sweet voice. As such, the owner of the press was pleased. After he completed his song, Teekhor said, "My throat has become dry. It would have been nice to have something to ease my throat." As he said this, the owner went in to bring something for him. As soon as he went in, Teekhor got down the press, brought out the earthen-jar from under his clothes and filled it with oil. Then he left. On returning home, he handed over the oil-filled jar to his sister. At this, she was happy and said, "There is oil now. But how will you eat the



When the men saw the fire, they run to 'save' their homes.

cakes without molasses ?" Again Teekhor went out. This time it was in search of molasses.

As he went on, Teekhor reached a shed where a few men were squeezing out juice from sugar-cane. When he saw them, he hit upon a plan. He set fire to a part of the nearby forest. As the coarse and dry grass caught fire, Teekhor hastened towards the men and said, "Look there, fire has broken out in your village. Your property will be burnt to ashes in no time."

The men saw the fire when they looked in that direction. They left the sugar-cane and molasses in the workshop and ran to 'save' their homes. In the meantime, Teekhor filled his pot with molasses and left the place. Suti-bai was very happy to have the molasses too. As she was making arrangements to prepare the cakes, suddenly she remembered that there was no fire-wood. At this, she said to her brother, "Teekhor, I forgot about fire-wood. Not a single piece of wood is there." On hearing her words, he took his axe and hastened out to bring fire-wood. He entered a dense forest and began to cut the dry branches of a tree. As he did so, a tiger came near and called out. "Who are you ? You are cutting the branches of the tree quite freely. Don't you know this is my garden ? Why are you stealing wood from here ?"

On seeing the tiger, Teekhor was frightened. But he concealed his fear and replied, "Is it our dear brother, the tiger ? Oh yes, it is ! I know that this is your garden. I thought you would let your beloved younger brother take a few pieces of wood ? Do you know that I am holding a feast with cakes in my house. I thought of inviting you as well as taking a few pieces of fire-wood"

On hearing Teekhor's words, the tiger was pleased and said, "My brother, take as much firewood as you want. I will go to have your cakes. Where shall I eat if I don't go to your place ? But, when shall I go ?" Teekhor pointed towards the direction of his house and said, "Please come the day you see a dark smoke rising there." Saying this, he collected 4 enough fire-wood and reached home. After this, his sister fried him cakes and Teekhor ate to his heart's content. The tiger didn't know about it. Next day, he set fire to a heap of damp hay in his

courtyard to create a lot of smoke. He made his sister prepare three cakes. One was placed at the gateway, another was placed at the doorway and one was placed on the rice-pounder (*dhekee*). Then alongwith his sister, he climbed up the high platform. The one kept at the gateway was made of powdered rice, the one on the doorway was made of arum and the one placed on the rice pounder was made of lime. On seeing the smoke, the tiger arrived. When he reached the gateway to Teekhor's house, he straightaway ate the cake placed there. Finding it to be delicious, he went on to eat the cake placed on the doorway. When he ate it, his throat began to itch. Unable to tolerate the irritation, he reached the rice-pounder and finding a cake placed on it, he ate it too. His throat was severely affected. Being unable to swallow anything, the tiger died in great agony.

Meanings :

Teekhor : active, expert, courageous, sharp.

Suti-bai : *Suti* --- of small stature.

bai --- a form of address to an elder sister.

CHAMPAWATI

Once upon a time, in a certain place, there lived a rich man. He had two wives. The elder one was *Laagee* (favourite) and the younger one was *Aelaagee* (alienated). Each of the two wives gave birth to a daughter. According to the advice of the elder wife, the husband made a hut in the backyard for the younger wife and her daughter to stay. *Aelaagee* lived alongwith her daughter in misery. Her daughter was named *Champawati*. One day, her father ordered Champawati to look after his paddy-field. Everyday she used to keep a watch over the crops from a



Champawati used to keep a watch over the crops from a high platform.

high platform and drove away the birds. Many days passed in this way. One day, climbing onto the high platform in order to guard the paddy, she sang out ----

"Go away quails; don't eat my paddy.

I will give you parched rice instead."

As she said this, someone from the nearby forest replied ----

"I will eat paddy as well as rice.

I will marry Champawati and take her home."

Hearing this, Champawati looked around. She was surprised as she didn't see any human-being. After her return in the evening, Champawati narrated to her mother about the day's incident. The next day, her mother accompanied Champa to the paddy-field in order to be sure. Her mother asked Champa to sing out as on the day before. As she did so, the same reply came out from the forest.

The mother was amazed. She asked Champa to sing out once more and the same reply was heard. Both mother and daughter returned home. *Aelaagee* told her husband about it. He alongwith *Aelaagee*, Champa and a few neighbours went to the paddy field. When Champa was told to sing out, she did so. The same reply was heard again. They all went into the forest to find out the one who made the reply. But they didn't see anyone. After that, Champa's father looked towards the forest and called out, "If you



A huge python came out of the forest.

really went Champawati, then whoever you are, appear before us. I promise to give her in marriage to you." On hearing this, a huge python came out from the forest. The people started to run away out of fear. But Champa's father asked them not to do so and they again assembled together. Then, he invited the python to his house. *Aelaagee* and her daughter started to cry in each other's arms. *Aelaagee* pleaded to her husband not to marry off their daughter to the python. But, on *Laagee's* advice, he gave his daughter in marriage to the python. Then he arranged a separate house for the mother, the daughter and the son-in-law. *Laagee* was overwhelmed with joy as Champawati would be devoured by the python that very night. The python was kept with Champawati in the same room. Thinking that the python would swallow her, Champawati prayed to God for mercy. Next morning, her mother got up hurriedly and went to her daughter's place. She saw that Champawati's body was decked with gold ornaments. But the python was not there. When her mother woke up Champawati, she was elated to find herself adorned with gold ornaments. On the other hand, thinking that the python had devoured Champawati, her father came alongwith *Laagee* to see for themselves. But they were wonder struck to see her glitter in gold ornaments. Seeing that, *Laagee* was jealous and kept pestering her husband to bring a python for her daughter too. As such, he took some men alongwith him to a dense forest in order to search for a python. They found one and brought it home. *Laagee* too married her daughter to the python. Like Champawati, her daughter too was made to sleep with the python. *Laagee's* joy knew no bounds as she thought that her daughter too would get gold ornaments to wear. She didn't sleep that night but, she sat beside the bed-room. On the other hand, the python started to swallow *Laagee's* daughter from the foot upwards. The daughter said to her mother from inside ----

"Mother, my foot tickles."

The mother replied from outside ----

"Dear, my son-in-law adorns you with anklets."

Gradually, the python reached the waist. The daughter said----

"Mother, my waist tickles."

The mother said ----

"Dear, my son-in-law dresses you in a waist-band."

After that, when the python reached the chest, the daughter called out -----

"Mother, my chest tickles."

The mother replied -

"Dear, my son-in-law dresses you with a shawl."

When the python reached the neck, the daughter called out--

"Mother, my neck tickles."

The mother replied -----

"Dear, my son-in-law adorns you
with a string of beads."

Slowly, when the python reached the head, the daughter's voice ceased. The mother thought, "On getting the ornaments, my daughter must be happy and has gone to sleep." So thinking, the mother was delighted and went to bed. In the morning, the mother woke up in a delightful mood and went to see her daughter. She didn't see her daughter. But, the python lay pot-bellied after devouring her daughter. Then only she realized what had happened and started to cry aloud. On hearing her cry, her husband came out and asked what had happened. When she told him about the incident, he fell flat on the ground. *Aelaagee* and *Champawati* cried too. All the villagers came and ridiculed the couple. Then they took out the corpse of the daughter from the python's belly by splitting it open and cremated her. After that, the husband and *Laagee* didn't even want to see *Aelaagee* and *Champawati*. All the time they used to think of some means by which they could get rid of the two. One night, when they went to do away with them taking along with them their swords, the python came out suddenly and swallowed the two conspirators. Then, it lifted *Champawati* and her mother who were fast asleep and took them to a house amidst a forest. The next day, when they woke up, they started to cry as they found themselves in an unknown place. The python said, "You have nothing to worry about here; I have brought you here." He narrated about the previous night's incident. When he finished, both the mother and the daughter were grateful to him. The three of them began to live happily in the forest. While staying there, one day the mother suddenly fell ill and died. After a few days, an old woman turned up in that house when the python had gone out.



One day, an old woman turned up at the python's house.

Champawati had not seen any human-being for a long time. As such, she was very happy to see the woman. She received her with due courtesy. When she inquired of her about her whereabouts, the woman said, "Dear, the python who is your husband is in reality, a god. Every night he makes sure that you are asleep by pinching you. Then he sheds the skin of the python and leaves for heaven. There he whiles a few hours away with the gods. If you want to see your python in the form of a god, pretend to be asleep tonight. When he sheds his skin and goes to heaven, you burn it in fire. As soon as you burn the skin, there would be a burning sensation on his body. Unable to tolerate it, he would come back and appear before you. Then you fan him hurriedly and let him repose. Soon he would fall asleep. In the morning, you tender your hearty greetings and garland him. He is none other than your husband who appears in the form of a python." On hearing the old woman, *Champawati* was elated.

She gave her a potful of silver and a potful of gold before bidding her to leave. When she did as she was told, a healthy man appeared before her and she bowed to him. After that, the two lived happily for months. One day, when the husband was away from home, the old woman came again. Champawati asked her to take a seat and enquired of the reason behind her visit. This time, the woman said with duplicity, "Dear, I have come to say something for your well-being. You ask your husband tomorrow to have lunch with you from the same dish. When he does, you too eat alongwith him without any hesitation. As a result, he would be mesmerised and won't be able to part from you even for a moment. After you finish eating, you tell him that, while having food, it seemed that you had seen many villages in side his mouth. So, you ask him to open his mouth wide so that you could see the entire world. At that, he would be angry with you and he may ask you to choose between him and the world. But you insist that you want to see the world. He would show you the world by opening his mouth and then plunge into the river. He would say that you will see him after six years. But don't be carried away by it. You keep sitting on the bank of the river. After a while you would see him coming back to you again." At this, Champawati was delighted. As before, she bade farewell to the woman by presenting her with a potful of gold and a potful of silver. Finding that she has been successful in her evil design, the old woman left happily. Next day, Champawati sat to eat alongwith her husband from the same dish. The husband said, "Your intentions are slowly getting dubious." But he ate from the same dish. After having lunch, she asked him to show her the world just as the old woman had told her. At that, her husband said, "In that case, you shall not see me again." As Champawati didn't pay attention to his words, he went to the river and asked her if she would prefer to have him or would like to see the world. She said that she wanted to have him as well as to see the world.

Her husband opened his mouth and showed her the world. Then he gave her a gold ring and said to her, "The old woman under whose instruction you have done this is my mother's head-maid. My mother is a cannibal. I married you instead of the girl she chose for me. She wants to part you from me so that she can devour you. The old woman deceived you in order to succeed in their conspiracy. They thought that if my mother devoured you,

I would be compelled to marry that girl of her choice. So, I am giving you this gold ring. Keep it properly. If you keep this with you, no demon or malicious being would be able to harm you. If you ever part with the ring, great danger would befall you. Under the influence of this ring, you will find me at my mother's place after six years. Now I have to keep my word and take leave. Be careful, don't lose the ring." Saying this, her husband plunged into the river. Then Champawati came to realize the situation and she started crying. After that, she left home. She held the ring close to her bosom and kept on crying as she wandered through forests. Her husband's mother tried to devour her by different means. But the ring protected her. Days rolled on. It was the sixth year of their parting. One day, suddenly Champa found her husband. Both of them were highly delighted and they continued to live together again.

On the other hand, the mother was very angry to see her daughter-in-law come back. As soon as Champawati met her husband, the ring disappeared. Still she couldn't do her any harm as her son was near. One day, she secretly wrote a letter in such words as, "This is my prime enemy. Slay and devour her but send a portion of her flesh to me." Then she handed over the letter to Champawati and sent her to a certain demon. According to the order of her mother-in-law, she hastened to deliver the letter without the knowledge of her husband. At about that time, he arrived and suspected malice. So he rushed behind her and stopped her. He snatched the letter from her hand and read it. The contents of the letter made him mad with rage. He went home and without any exchange of words slew his mother. After that, both of them left that house and the village of the demons. They set up a separate town of their own and lived happily thereafter with family and friends.

Meanings :

Laagee : Beloved, favourite (as a wife).

Aelaagee : not liked by one's husband, being alienated.

Champa : a species of yellow fragrant flower (michelia chapaca)
 ['Champa' is pronounced as 'Sompa' in Assamese. As such, the name 'Champawati' is uttered as 'Sompawoti'].

THE TALE OF THE FOOLISH KING

A learned teacher of a certain place set out to travel with a pupil. They reached a town of a certain kingdom. They found that, food-stuff and all essential commodities were very cheap and sold at throw away prices. The teacher said to the student, "It would be good for us to stay here for some days." As such, they sought and found lodging in a house.

One day, a thief entered a house near the king's premises by making a hole below the wall of the house. After stealing, when he was about to go out, the owner of the house caught hold of him and



The thief was brought before the king.

tied him up. Then he took him to the king. The king started the trial in his court. He thought over the matter a great deal and found that if the hole were not large enough the thief wouldn't have been able to enter. So thinking, the king asked the thief, "You thief, why did you make a large hole?" The thief replied, "Oh Your majesty ! Severe me or kill me. My mattock was quite large. As such, when I dug with it, the hole became large. At this reply, the king said, "O yes, where is the fault of the thief ? Why did the blacksmith make a large mattock ? Catch the blacksmith. Bring him. Tie him up and present before me." At the king's order the messenger went and tied up the blacksmith and brought him before the king. The king asked, "Hey blacksmith ! Why did you make the mattock so large ? If you didn't do so, the thief could have never dug a large hole and entered the house to steal." The blacksmith knelt before the king and said, "Your Majesty, when I was making the mattock, your maid-servant went swiftly before me. When I noticed her, I gave an extra strike to the mattock by mistake." On hearing him, the king said, "It is true that it's none of your fault. Why did she pass before you at that time ? Catch her. Bring her." As soon as the king gave this order, the messenger went and brought her. The king told her, "Do speak the truth. Why did you run before the blacksmith while he was making the mattock?" With folded hands, the maid-servant said, "Lord, even if you kill me, I can't but say that it was time of the queen's delivery. As such, I was running to call the mid-wife." The king said, "It's true. It's none of her fault. My son is to be blamed. Why did he want to be born at that time ? Bring my son." At the king's order, the little prince was brought before him. The king asked the prince, "Why did you want to be born at that time ?" The baby prince kept quiet as he couldn't answer. As such, the king ordered the prince to be put to the stake and said, "So what if he is my son. I am justice incarnate. I can never be unjust. As such, I will put him to the stake in order to provide justice." At this order, the minister thought, "A bad thing has happened. I have to make a plan to avert this." Thinking so, the minister said to the king, "Your Majesty, this baby can't be put to the stake. Only a stout and fleshy man would be good for this." On hearing the minister's words, the

king ordered, "Whoever is stout and fleshy in my kingdom must man is to be found and brought to be put to the stake in place of the prince." The minister sent a messenger to find out such a man in the town.

On the other hand, the teacher and his pupil in the town grew fleshy by consuming rich food at so low a cost. The teacher had gone out somewhere. No sooner the king's men saw the



The teacher came to the king's palace as on astrology.

stout and fleshy student, they caught hold of him and took him away. When the teacher returned home, he didn't find his student. On enquiry, he came to know that the king's men had taken him away to put him to the stake. The teacher immediately came to the king's palace. He blessed the king. When the king asked him to introduce himself, the teacher said, "I am an astrologer. I can tell about the past and future by reading palms." When the king asked the teacher to tell about his fortune as well as that of the queen, the teacher pleased him by telling several nice things. At that time, the king said, "Tomorrow a man will be put to stake in the morning. What can you say about him?" On hearing this, the teacher did numerous calculations and said, "Your Majesty ! That man is very fortunate. Whoever is put to stake tomorrow at that time would go to heaven immediately and become the king out there." At these words, the king jumped up and said, "When I am here, no lowly person can become the king of heaven ? I will never let such a thing to happen." Saying so, the king called his minister and ordered, "Leave that man right now. I will mount the stake tomorrow. No one else should mount." The order was carried out. The next day, the foolish king was put to the stake.

PAANESOI

In a certain village, there lived an old woman. She had a beloved son. One day, he found a duck's egg. He handed it to his mother. She kept the egg on the wooden shelf in the kitchen. The egg cracked and a beautiful girl came out. She hid herself in the shelf. When the



The egg cracked and a beautiful girl came out.

old woman used to go out, the girl would always come down from the shelf and eat the old woman's share of cold rice. Then she would cook fresh rice for the old lady and quietly climb onto the shelf again. One day, it struck the old woman as to who might be the one to eat the cold rice and cook fresh rice in its place. On a certain day, she planned and called to her neighbours, "I am going to a distant place today. You all look after my house." So saying, she hid herself in the corner of the door. As in other days, the girl came down to eat. Then she cooked. After that, as she was climbing onto the shelf, the old woman suddenly caught her by the leg and asked her, "Where are you from? Why are you staying here?" At this, the girl told everything in detail. From that day onwards, she began to stay openly in the old woman's house and she was named *Paanesoi*. When people asked the woman about the girl, she used to tell that she was her daughter.

Gradually, the old woman's son grew up into a youth. He wanted to marry *Paanesoi*. As he felt shy to disclose his feelings to his mother, he went up to the high platform and kept himself in solitary confinement. On the other hand, the mother raised a hue and cry as she moved restless in search of her son. Later, when she went to sweep that room, she found chewed betel-nut below the platform. As she looked up, she saw her son. She called out to him, "Come down, my child. I will give you whatever you want." Then the son told her about his wish to marry *Paanesoi*. Being unable to put him off, she fixed the marriage without the knowledge of *Paanesoi*. On the day of marriage, *Paanesoi* was pounding pulse and turmeric near the river-bank when an old beggar-woman came, and sat near her. The woman asked for a handful of pulse. *Paanesoi* said, "Go away! I am pounding this for my brother's marriage. How can I give you?" At this, the woman said, "You are pounding pulse and turmeric for your brother's marriage. But, do you know who the bride is?" *Paanesoi* said, "I don't know, tell me who is she?" The woman said, "Who would be the bride but you. Dear me! You are the one." On hearing that, *Paanesoi* was frightened. She asked the old woman, "Aunt, what am I to do now?" The woman said, "You take a boat and an oar made of reeds and, keep rowing in the large pond behind your house. Never go even if you are being called. At night, you stay in



Paanesoi was pounding pulse and turmeric near the river-bank.

the stump of the felled tree." Saying so, she left. On reaching home, Paanesoi did accordingly. Her mother kept calling out to her, but she didn't come. So, her mother pleaded ----

"Paanesoi, Paanesoi, my dear Paanesoi,
draw the boat near me.
I will give you handfuls of food,
and make you wear a necklace too.
You shall sit on a large stool to eat,
and a servant would serve you."

Paanesoi replied to her mother ----

"I won't take your handfuls,
I won't draw the boat near you.
I won't sit on a large stool to eat,
nor do I want to be served by a servant."

The brother said to Paanesoi ----

"Paanesoi, Paanesoi, my sister Paanesoi,
draw the boat near me.
I will give you handfuls to eat,
and make you wear a necklace too.
You shall sit on a large stool to eat,
and a servant would serve you."

Paanesoi replied ----

"Brother, brother, O my brother,
I won't draw the boat near you.
I won't take your handfuls,
I won't wear any necklace.
I won't sit on a large stool to eat,
nor do I want to be served by a servant.
Earlier you were my dear brother
Now you want to be my husband."

When Paanesoi said so and didn't come, the mother and the son went home in grief. In the daytime, Paanesoi used to keep rowing the boat. At night, she stayed inside the stump of the felled tree.

One day the brother was angling while sitting on that stump. He caught no large fish. Only a few tiny fish were pecking at the bait on the fish-hook. Seeing that, Paanesoi called out from inside the stump-

"No fish pecks at the hook, only the tiny ones do.

See, my brother angles sitting on the stump."

Thus she called out several times. Hearing this, the brother



The old beggar-woman came and asked for a strip of wood.

took an axe and hewed the stump into strips. At that time, the old beggar- woman came and asked for a strip of wood. He said in anger, "You were the one who broke my marriage. Now you have come in search of wood. I won't give you. Go away." The woman picked up a strip of wood from the slush by the river which lay scattered there. She washed it and kept it on the bamboo-platform in the kitchen. Paanesoi was there in that strip of wood. In the day, when the old woman went out, she used to eat the cold rice and prepare boiled rice in its place. Many days passed in this manner. One day, the woman caught her. In the daytime, Paanesoi used to stay in the form of a crippled duck. At night, she used to turn into a girl and slept with the old woman. One day, the brother was playing with a ball in the woman's

courtyard alongwith a few friends. Paanesoi was cackling nearby while she was in the form of the duck. When the brother threw the ball, she seized it instantly and took it away. He thought, "This one is no ordinary duck; it is not a duck, but something else." Thinking so, he entered the solitary chamber to express his displeasure. When his mother asked him what had taken place, he said, "I want the duck which is there in the old woman's place." The mother pleaded the woman and gave her silver coins in order to have the duck for her son. The boy kept the duck with care and let it sleep with him on his bed. One day, the son narrated everything to an old female beggar. She said, "My son, that creature is not a duck. She is your Paanesoi. Tonight, you pretend as if you are asleep. The duck would peck at you, but you don't get up. Then she would think that you are asleep. As she changes her form and goes out, you put the skin and feathers into fire. She would run in immediately and fall unconscious. Then you gently massage oil, water and lemon on her head with the palm of your hand and fan her. When you do so, she would regain her senses." Saying so, the beggar-woman left. That night when the boy did accordingly, the duck turned into a beautiful girl. She was Paanesoi. Soon, he married her and lived a long and happy conjugal life.

THE TALE OF THE SON-IN-LAW

One day, a man invited his son-in-law to a feast on the New Year's day. In order to honour the invitation, the son-in-law started in the afternoon. As his father-in-law asked him to come alone, he didn't



The father-in-law invited his son-in-law to a feast on the New Year's day.

take anyone with him. But after going a short distance, he saw that his shadow was also coming along with him. He thought that his father-in-law had asked him not to bring anyone else and if he took his shadow, he would be annoyed. So thinking, he said to the shadow, "What do you want? Why are you following me? Go away." But the shadow did not respond. Then he asked the shadow again, "Why don't you speak? Do you want my shawl?" Saying this, when he nodded his head, the shadow too moved its head a little. When he saw the shadow nodding its head, he thought that it wanted his shawl. Thinking this, he dropped his shawl there and went away. On his way, he again saw the shadow. This time, he gave his tunic to the shadow. At last he ended up giving his loin-cloth. Slowly, evening set in. The shadow was not to be seen. Then he thought that the shadow had gone. The son-in-law was suffering from night-blindness. As such, after going a little distance, he was unable to find the way. At about this time, he saw an old cow

that belonged to his father-in-law. He caught hold of the tail of the old cow and followed it. After sometime, he reached his father-in-law's house. But as he did not have his clothes on, he felt ashamed to appear in front of his father-in-law. Instead, he sat under a plantain-tree amidst the place where leaves are dumped after having food in them. The father-in-law waited till late in the night for his son-in-law to arrive. Later when he saw that he didn't come, he had his



The son-in-law sat under a plantain-tree amidst other plants.

meal and went to bed. After washing the used utensils, the mother-in-law came out in the dark to throw the filthy water into the dumping ground. As she threw the dirty water into the dumping ground, it fell on the head of her son-in-law. Hearing the exclamatory sound of someone, the old lady fetched the lamp to see who was out there. On finding it to be her son-in-law, she called him inside and made him wash the filth from his body. She gave finding it to be her son-in-law, she called him inside and made him wash the filth from his body. She gave him clothes and served him food. Along with rice, he was given molasses. As he had never seen molasses, he refused to have it. The mother-in-law said, "Eat. This liquid molasses is very tasty." After having a little, he found out that it was indeed tasty. He asked, "Where is this to be found?"



The son-in-law bored the pitcher and began to have the molasses.

The mother in -law replied, "It is there in the pitcher kept on the high shelf." After the meal, the mother-in-law made arrangements for the son -in- law to sleep and went to bed. The son-in-law lay down but he was not able to sleep. That was because he went on thinking about the molasses. When he came to know that his father-in-law was asleep, he took a stick and bored the pitcher. Then he placed his mouth under the hole he made in the pitcher and began to have the molasses. On finishing the molasses, he saw that his body was sticky. That was because molasses fell on him. He saw that some silk-cotton kept on the floor to make a mattress. Finding no alternative, he lay down on the silk-cotton. After that, he saw that his body turned white as if covered with 'hair'. A few goats were tied up nearby. At the sight of the goats, he thought of spending the night quietly among them and acted accordingly. That night, thieves came to steal goats. They thought that they would take way the goat whose hair would give way as soon as they pull it. This was because such goats are fatty. They touched the man first and found that the 'hair' was giving way. So, they thought him to be a 'fatty goat'. They were pleased and took him by suspending him from a pole on their shoulders. On their way, they had to cross a river. When they reached the middle of the river, the hind parts of the man touched the water and became wet. He said to the thieves -----

"Raise ! Raise me thieves.

My hinds have become wet."

The thieves thought that the 'goat' had said the words and being mortally scared, they dropped the son-in-law in the water and ran away for life. As the water was not deep, he was not drowned. Slowly, he came up to the bank and sat there. At about this time, it was dawn. As he was sitting alone on the bank of the river, his father-in-law was surprised to find him there. However, he was brought to his house. After feeding him, the son-in-law was sent home.

THE MAN WITH NIGHT-BLINDNESS

In a certain village, a man had two beautiful daughters. The elder one's name was *Rupeswari* and the younger one was called *Guneswari*. When *Rupeswari* was of a marriageable age, her father endeavoured to find a groom for her. But he didn't find a suitable boy. As such, his father set out to a distant village in search of a groom. At that time, *Rupeswari*'s mother told her husband, "Don't go far away in search of a groom. I won't give my daughter in marriage to a far off place. If she marries nearby, I shall be able to see her now and then. But that wouldn't be possible if she is married to a boy from a distant place." Unable to refuse his wife's wish, he married off *Rupeswari* to a youth who stayed nearby.

Rupeswari's husband was suffering from night-blindness; but he concealed this from others. As such, neither the villagers nor his in-laws knew about it.

The son-in-law brought a bullock from his father-in-law and ploughed his farm-land for a few days. One day his father-in-law asked him to return the bullock. That day, it was towards the evening that the bullock returned home. The night-blind son-in-law was in trouble. The problem was to take the bullock to the house of his father-in-law at that hour. He thought for a long time and then he decided to turn it to the direction of his father-in-law's house. Then he would go on by catching hold of its tail, for he was sure that the bullock would reach its familiar place. As he did so, the animal went and entered into its own shed and he too reached there by holding onto its tail. Seeing his son-in-law, the father-in-law asked, "Is that our son-in-law?" The son-in-law answered, "Yes, as you asked for the bullock, I have brought it and I am tying it to a post in the shed."

Even after this, when the son-in-law didn't come out, the father-in-law called out, "Come out, what are you doing there? Wash your hands and face and have some rice. Do not go without having your meal." The son-in-law answered, "I am counting the number of cows in your cow-shed." At this, the father-in-law said, "What is there to count? There are a few sickly cows, the better ones have died of disease." Saying this, he went inside and said to his daughter



The son-in-law caught hold of the bullock's tail and went on.

Guneswari, "My dear daughter, take a pot of water and call your brother-in-law for wash."

On the other hand, the son-in-law came out of the cow-shed and groped his way to go home. At that time, his sister-in-law called out, "Brother, come and have a wash. Here is the water."

Hearing the voice of his sister-in-law, he answered, "Is it my dear sister-in-law? Come and receive me with civility or else, I won't go. Where will you find a brother-in-law like me?" As demanded by him, the innocent *Guneswari* held her brother-in-law by his hand and pleaded him to come. Then she pushed the water-pot towards him to wash his feet. At that, he called out, "You wash my feet; I have come after a long time. It seems that all of you have lost affection for me." *Guneswari* thought that her brother-in-law

was joking. But she washed his feet, took him inside by holding his hand and made him sit on a mat.

Soon, it was time for the meal. The father-in-law sat down to eat. The mother in law served the plate of her son-in-law and called out for him to have his food. But he doesn't get up. When she called out many times, he answered, "I am very tired today, I can't even get up. If you all love me, serve my food here." On hearing him, she brought his food near him. Food was served, but he couldn't see, so he didn't eat. Seeing that, Guneswari said, "*Bhindeu*, have your food." He answered, "I will eat only when you make my hands touch the rice, or else I won't eat. That is because you won't stay for long in your father's place. You would be married in a short time. As such, I would like to make you work in these day. Only then you would remember me." On hearing him, Guneswari held his hand and made him touch the rice. After that, he started to eat. then, the



The mother-in-law saw a cat eating rice from a part of his plate.

sister-in-law went inside to have food. After sometime the mother-in-law came out and saw a cat eating rice from a part of the plate of the son-in-law. Seeing that, she told him, "Son, can't you see that a cat is eating from a side of your plate; Why don't you drive it off?" He answered, "Mother, let it be. Is it reasonable that only man should eat? Other animals too need food. Let the cat eat, I am eating too; let us finish the food by eating together." The mother-in-law said, "No, you drive the cat away. Don't you feel loathed at all?" Saying this, she drove away the cat. She said him to shoo away the cat if it came again and handed him a piece of fire-wood for the purpose. Then she went inside. When she again brought some fried fish and gravy for him, the son-in-law thought that the cat had come back to eat from his plate. Thinking so, he hit the hand of his mother-in-law with the piece of wood. She cried in pain and said, "What have you done? You have struck my hand." Then the son-in-law realized what a grave mistake he did. He caught hold of her feet and said, "Mother, I fell asleep while eating. I thought that the cat had come again and was eating from my plate. As such, I have beaten you mistaking you to be the cat. I pray at your feet. Forgive me and donot tell about this to anyone." She however forgave him and told him not to worry. So saying, she went in. Then the son-in-law got up from his seat and groped his way out to wash his hands. After this incident, he felt very much ashamed to go inside. So, he started for home without telling anybody. After going a few steps, he could not find his way and entered into the part of their courtyard which was full of wild arum. He took it to be a large forest and thought, "It is not possible for me to get out of it in the darkness of night. I will stay in here. As soon as dawn sets in, I shall leave for home without being seen by anyone." Thinking so, he sat there without any anxiety. On the other hand, when the in-laws didn't find him, they thought that he had gone home. After sometime, the mother-in-law brought a tub full of foul water and threw the dirty wae among the shrubs beneath which the son-in-law was hiding. He was completely drenched. But, he thought that it was raining. So he called out, "O Rain-God! Be kind to this miserable victim and donot send anymore rain. The humiliation I have suffered today is enough. Donot send more sorrow to this unfortunate." On hearing the voice of the son-in-law, the mother-in-law hurriedly fetched a

lamp and saw that he was sitting drenched amidst the shrubs. Then she understood that he was a victim of night-blindness. She called out to her husband and her daughter and told them everything. Then the son-in-law was taken in and bathed. He was dressed in a dry clothes and made him sleep on a mat for the night.

Meanings :

- Rupeswari* : a girl endowed with beauty.
Guneswari : a girl endowed with virtue.
Bhindeu : the husband of an elder sister.

THE TALE OF THE FROG

In a village, there lived an old couple. They were childless and very poor. One day, the villagers went out for community-fishing. As they ventured with their fishing implements, they called out loudly for all to join in the activity. The old couple too were eager to go. They had only broken implements which they took along with them for the purpose. The villagers descended into the lake and each caught plenty of fish. But the old couple couldn't even catch a small fish. Finally, the old man was angry and started a quarrel with his wife to give vent to his anger. Upon hearing the scolding of the old man, the old woman in her dismay, tried to catch something however small. But, she could catch only a frog. Seeing the frog, the old man was greatly annoyed. In his fury, he took it home in order to kill it which served as a means to pacify his anger.

On reaching home, the old man threw the frog in his courtyard and



The old man was about to strike the frog's head.

brought a piece of fire-wood. As he was about to strike the frog's head, it called out, "Grandpa, do not beat me. I will stay as a servant in your house and do whatever you would tell me to do." The old man replied, "Alright. It seems that you will provide me with precious wealth by staying in my house. Will you be able to plough my field?" The frog said, "I will plough for you. You just keep me and you'll see." On hearing the frog's words, the old man thought, "Let me see what he does, he seems to brag too much." The old man therefore spared the frog and kept it. The next morning he said to the frog, "Take the pair of bullocks to the field, let me see how you plough." Accordingly, the frog went out to the field taking along the bullocks and the plough with him. That day, he ploughed a plot and after that, he started to build an embankment across the field.

At that time, the king came to visit the village. He and his entourage destroyed the embankment as they walked upon it. Seeing this, the frog started to abuse the king. On hearing that, the king looked all around, but he saw the pair of bullocks and no one else. Being abused again and again, he became irritated and took away the bullocks in a spate of anger.

At that, the frog came out of the mud and returned home. He told everything to the old couple about the incident. They began to grieve. The frog said to the old woman, "Grandma, do not be sad. Give me a basket of roasted gram. I am going to bring the bullocks back home." She asked, "What are you going to do with the gram?" The frog said, "I will do whatever I have to. You just give me and don't worry." The old man said, "Son, you needn't go and bring back the bullocks. By disputing with the king, you cannot do anything, you will only be put to death. I will hire bullocks in order to cultivate, you needn't go." But the frog would not give in. As such, the old woman fried a basketful of grams. The frog took it and went out. He put the grams in a bag and took a handful of them for himself. As he ate them on his way, he sang out ----

"I gather grams to eat,
I go on my way,
Whoever comes alongwith me,
I give the one a handful too."

At the frog's words, in the hope of eating gram, lions, tigers, bears and other wild animals joined him. Even bees, wasps and hornets gathered. The frog gave all the animals a lot of grams to eat. After

satisfying them, he told about the incident to them. They all agreed to fight with the king alongwith him. The frog and all the animals grumbled in anger as they went to the king's gateway and said out to him, "Will



The frog and all the animals went to the king's gateway.

the king return my bullocks or fight me?" When the king opted to fight, the frog's army entered into a fierce battle against the king's army. When the king lost many soldiers and his two sons in the battle, the helpless king brought the bullocks out and prostrated at the feet of the frog. By adorning the neck of the frog with a shawl, he said, "If the frog forgives me for this time, then I will give him half of my kingdom and my daughter." On hearing this, the frog forgave the king and became his son-in-law by marrying his daughter. He brought the old couple to the king's palace and all of them together lived there happily ever after.

THE TALE OF TAWOI

There were two very intimate friends. When one of them was about to die, he entrusted his son to the other and said, "Friend, I am handing over my son to you. You give him advice and bring him



The dying father entrusted his son to his intimate friend.

up." He also said to his son, "I am handing you over to my friend. Do whatever my friend tells you to do. Never disobey him. Whenever you have to do something, consult him first."

The father died. His son too lived on by obeying his *tawoi's* (the friend of his father) words. One day, his wife gave birth to a son. He went to deliver the news to *tawoi*. But *tawoi* said, "Go and bury your son in the dumping pit at your backyard just now." He was astonished at these words. But recollecting his father's order, he didn't utter a word in protest but acted accordingly. A year after this, again a son was born to him but as on the earlier occasion, *tawoi* asked him to bury the baby. At this, he was sad but he did as he was told to do. One and a half year later, his wife gave birth to a girl-child. This time he thought that *tawoi* wouldn't tell him to bury his daughter. But he was surprised when *tawoi* told him to bury the girl as he said on the earlier occasions. He was helpless but keeping his grief to himself, he did accordingly. Two years after this, his wife gave birth to a son again. This time he thought of giving the news to *tawoi* but, whatever be the consequences, he would not bury the baby even if he was told to do so. Thinking so he went to *tawoi's* house to tell him about the birth of a son. *Tawoi* said, "Son, you bathe this baby and keep it. But let me tell you something, "Tonight, you place a stool near the spot where you buried your off-springs and keep watch as you sit on it." According to *tawoi's* words, he bathed the baby and accepted it. That very night, he placed a stool near the dumping pit, sat on it and kept watch.

It was midnight. About this time, the eldest son called out from inside the pit, "Brother ! I could not live on. If I were alive, I would have put my father on the stake. That fellow had a nice escape." The younger son called out, "Well brother ! If I were alive, I would have put a noose round his neck. His *tawoi* spoiled all our plans." After this, the daughter called out, "Oh brothers ! If I were alive, I would have stripped him of his wealth. What am I to say, I was undone."

Hearing this conversation, the man fully understood about the favour *tawoi* had done to him. Then his faith in *tawoi* became all the more firm.

A few days after this, it was time for him to sell paddy. He

reported to *tawoi*, "I want to sell my paddy." *Tawoi* asked him, "What is the price of paddy now?" He answered, "12 *puras* for a rupee." *Tawoi* said, "Don't sell it now."

After some days, he went to *tawoi's* place and said, "*Tawoi*, the price of paddy has fallen. What to do now? It seems that it would gradually fall further." *Tawoi* asked, "How many *puras* is it now?" He answered, "Now it is 20 *puras*." *Tawoi* said, "Go and sell it now." Accordingly, he sold 20 *puras* for a rupee and took the money to show the amount to his *tawoi*. *Tawoi* said, "Good. Now go and buy gold with this money and ask the goldsmith to shape it into a bead." So, he got a bead made of gold and brought it to show *tawoi*. *Tawoi* said, "Throw it into the river." He was sad to hear those words but having no alternative, he threw the gold bead into the river.

A few months later, a fisherman brought a large fish to his house for sale which he bought. But when he cut the fish, a gold bead fell out from its belly. On showing it to *tawoi*, he said, "This is your own thing because it has come back to you again. Go and keep it with care. You might have thought me to be your enemy till the other day. I am grateful to God as He enabled me to win your trust through these two incidents. Go my son, be pious, depend on God, do your duty and live happily. There is nothing to worry. May God help you to prosper."

Meanings :

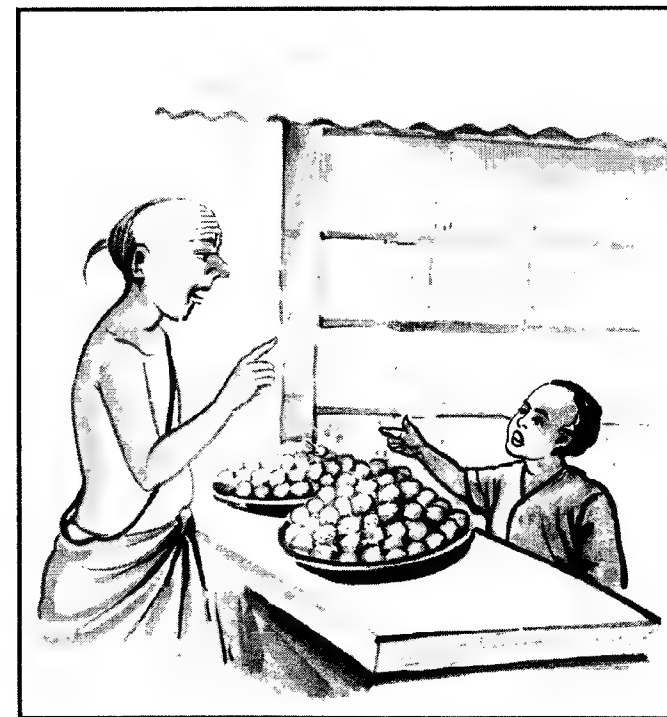
Tawoi : a friend of one's father, a friend's father.

pura : four *dons* of grain. (*don* --- a basket holding five seers of grain.)

LOTKON

In a country, there lived a very poor Brahmin by the name of *Lotkon*. The wife of the Brahmin was very quarrelsome. Finding her husband unable to earn money, she used to rebuke him constantly. On being constantly rebuked, one day the Brahmin felt very sad. He thought, "I shall go out of my house. If I am not able to earn a lot of money, I shall not return home." Thinking this, the Brahmin set out of his house early in the morning.

The Brahmin continued on his way but, till high noon, not even a morsel fell into his stomach. The Brahmin was dying of hunger and thirst. At about this time, he saw a shop dealing in confectionery by the side of the road, and the Brahmin went to it. Since it was noon, the owner of the shop went to take a nap after his lunch. In the meantime, he left his eight year old son as a keeper in the shop. As soon as the Brahmin stood near the shop, the boy asked, "What



The brahmin said to the little boy, "I have come to eat the sweets, my name is *Maakhee*."

do you want ? What is your name ?" The Brahmin replied, "I have come to eat the sweets, my name is *Maakhee*." ('*maakhee*' means, the fly). Saying this, he quickly began to put the sweets into his mouth. On seeing the Brahmin's deed, the boy called out to his father and said, "Father, Maakhee (the Brahmin) is eating the sweets." The father was half asleep when his son disturbed him calling. Annoyed, he replied, "If *maakhee* (the fly) is eating the sweets, then let it eat. Do not disturb me." Hearing this, the Brahmin said to the boy softly, "Do you hear now ? Your father has told me to eat the sweets." Saying this, the Brahmin ate half of the sweets. On seeing this, the boy was unable to tolerate any longer. He began to call out to his father again, "Father, Maakhee has finished eating half of the sweets." This time, the father cried out loudly in anger, "If it has halved, then let it do so. Don't keep on crying like a hungry young bird." Hearing this, the boy went inside to explain to his father the real aspect the matter. At the sight of the cash-box of the owner of the shop, the Brahmin decided to take the advantage of the boy's absence. He took out forty silver coins from it and fled from the scene. When the boy woke up his father and told about the matter in detail, he came out and saw that all the sweets were eaten. On being scolded by his father, the boy said, "I was telling you that Maakhee was eating sweets since the beginning itself. It was you who let him eat !" The father said, "You said *maakhee* (the fly) was eating, why did not you say that a man was eating ?" The son replied, "He told me that his name was Maakhee." He father asked his son about the direction in which the man fled and went after him on his horse.

After eating the sweets, while fleeing speedily, the Brahmin got tired. He sat under a road-side tree and was taking rest. At about this time, suddenly a wild-boar came out of the forest and rushed to attack the Brahmin. He got up and began to run around the tree. The boar too ran around. Both were turning around the tree when the Brahmin suddenly caught hold of the boar's tail with his hands. While he was turning around by holding on to the boar's tail, one by one the silver coins fell from his waist-band and was scattered all around the tree. The Brahmin was unable to leave the boar's tail, for, if he lets it go, the boar would attack him.

On the other hand, riding on horse-back, the owner of the sweets-stall came upon the place where he saw a man turning around a tree by holding on to a boar's tail. He stopped his horse at that spot and dismounted from his seat. He asked the Brahmin, "Hello, why are you making the boar turn by holding on to its tail ?" The Brahmin replied, "I do not have time to reply. Don't you see these coins ?" He said, "Well I see." The Brahmin said, "When the boar is turned in this way, with each turn, it drops a silver-coin. As such, I am turning it." On hearing this, the owner of the sweets-shop brooded upon the loss of the money he had to incur that day. He thought that it would be good if he could get lots of money in that manner. Thinking this, he said to the Brahmin, "Well, would you let me turn a few rounds too ? I am in distress. It would be a great favour if you give me a chance to earn a few silvers by turning the boar around. A cheat has stolen a lot of money from me by deceiving me. On hearing him, the Brahmin said, "You are a distressed traveller. I would earn piety by doing you favour. Alright, you turn it." Saying so, he asked the sweets-seller to catch the boar's tail while he was turning around. As soon as the sweets-seller caught onto the tail, he left his hold from it in an instant. He gathered the silver coins quickly, rode on his horse and left off. Unable to leave the boar's tail, the sweets-seller kept on going around because, if he lets the tail go off, the beast would kill him.

The Brahmin went quite a distance on his horse when evening set in. He stayed up as a guest in a certain household. Having eaten his dinner there, he went to bed. Before dawn, he went to the spot where his horse was being tied. Beneath the grass in front of the horse, he hid ten silver pieces and left. Then he went back to bed again. When the morning dawned, the host also woke up. The guest (the Brahmin) too woke up and was quick to take out the silver coins by shaking the grass laid in front of the horse. He took all steps so that the host takes notice of the act and he was successful. On seeing that, the host was surprised and asked about the mystery. The Brahmin said, "From the left out fodder of this horse, I get ten silver coins in the morning every day. I sustain myself with it." On hearing this, the host craved to own the horse. In order to buy it from the Brahmin, he began to haggle with its owner.



The host was surprised and asked the Brahmin about the silver coins.

After bargaining, he decided to buy the horse for six hundred rupees from the Brahmin. At first, the Brahmin did not agree. But finally, he said, "Alright, give me Rs. 650, and give me your horse for me to go home. As you are adamant, you take my horse." The host agreed to that and gave the Brahmin Rs. 650 (in silver) and his horse in exchange of the Brahmin's horse. The Brahmin tied his bundle of silver in haste and rode off on the horse given by the host. The Brahmin was returning by the

same way on which he ventured upon earlier. When he reached the spot where the tree stood, the *sweets*-seller called out, "You cheated me very well; there is no silver here. I am still turning around by holding on to the boar's tail and am about to faint." The Brahmin replied, "Look here, I did not cheat you. But listen to me, if you turn the boar by keeping the count of a hundred turns you give, then you would surely get hundred rupees in silver." The Brahmin saw that the boar was slowly getting weak. If it is turned around for hundred more turns, it would collapse. So saying, the Brahmin rode away on the horse. The sweets-seller was a bit relieved and was turning round and round when, after some time, the boar fell dead. After that, he thought of being saved and returned home. On the other hand, when the Brahmin reached home, he threw the money into the hands of his wife and said, "Take these silver." Seeing the silver, the wife of the Brahmin was greatly elated.

Meanings :-

- Brahmin* : Brahman; a member of the highest caste in Hindu religion.
- Lotkon* : a drop (pearl) worn in the ear, anything like it.
- maakhee* : fly (basically, the house-fly).

THE BLESSED WOMAN

In *Satya-Yuga*, there lived an old couple who had seven sons. The mother brought seven wives for her seven sons. The eldest daughter-in-law gave birth to a son. Among the seven daughters-in-law, the youngest one was a blessed woman. The old couple was nearing death. They ordered all the members of the family to act according to the advice of the youngest daughter-in-law. After that, they went on as they were told to. The youngest daughter-in-law used to scold them whenever she saw any of them come with empty hands from any quarter. As such, they always used to carry something or the other in their hands whenever they came from somewhere. One day, one of the brothers found a dead and decomposed snake on his way home. On finding it, he thought, "Our sister-in-law always



The youngest daughter-in-law saw a decayed snake on the fence.

scolds when she finds us come home empty-handed. I will take this snake home today. Let me see what happens." Thinking so, he took the snake along with him. Arriving at home, he kept it on the bamboo-fence in their courtyard and said out to her, "There is a thing out there. Take it. I am going for a bath." Coming out of the house, she saw a decayed snake on the fence and flies were laying eggs on it. Seeing that, she went inside and told him, "You have brought this decayed snake to show me. Alright, that doesn't matter." Saying so, she went out again and saw that a bundle was hanging at the spot where the snake lay before. The bundle was torn but full of gold ornaments and gems. She ran and brought the bundle in and showed it to him, "See, you brought the snake as you were angry with me. But now, where from have these ornaments come out? You all were annoyed when I prohibited you from coming home empty-handed, now you see." On the bank of the river, a girl tied her ornaments into a bundle and left it there before going to take bath in the river. As she descended towards the water, a kite swept down, seized the bundle and flew away with it. But she didn't find any food there. So, when the kite saw the snake, she lifted it and dropped the bundle in its place.

After a few days, another brother of her husband brought a bundle of dry cow-dung and thrust it into the thatched roof. He said to the youngest daughter-in-law, "There is a thing out here. Keep it." On opening the bundle, she saw the mass of dry cow - dung. She thought of keeping it in the hollow of a bamboo-tube and did so. After about five years, a king sought cow-dung which was five years old for preparing a medicine for his ailing daughter. But finding it nowhere, he announced, "Whoever gives me such cow-dung, will be given two pots filled with gold." This was announced in the town with the help of a drummer. Suddenly, the youngest daughter-in-law remembered the bundle of cow-dung which was kept by her. She sent it to the king and the king rewarded her with two pots full of gold.

One day, a mendicant with magic powers who came begging cast a charm on the youngest daughter-in-law and took her along with him. After that, the people of that household died one after another. Even the domestic animals were lost or fell dead. Only the son of the eldest brother of her husband survived. Being unable to save

anything, he travelled over different countries. One day, he came across his aunt near a river - bank in the midst of a forest. As soon as they met, they recognised each other, and the nephew said, "There is no existence of our house-hold. I am the only one to survive." His aunt cried as she said, "The mendicant doesn't let me go. Even if I run away, he knows a lot of incantation to deter me. I have heard him say that his soul is in the *mynah* that stays near Lord Brahma. If you can kill the bird, I will be freed." On hearing this, the nephew went to plead Brahma and prayed to Him imploringly. Brahma was very pleased and gave His daughter to him in marriage. After that, the nephew said, "Give me the *mynah* too."

Moved by his entreaty, Brahma gave him the bird too. As soon as he got the bird, he strangled it to death. At the same time, the mendicant also fell dead. Then only his aunt came to know that the *mynah* was dead. Later on, he alongwith his wife and aunt, set up a new house-hold. It was by the blessings of Brahma that they could amass property and personal assets as before and became wealthy and prosperous within a short time.

Meanings :

Satya-Yuga : the first *Yuga*(i.e., Age/Era) or "Golden Age", comprising 17,28,000 years. The people of this age were truthful and pious.

Brahma : the Creator, one of the Gods of the Hindu Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva).

THE TWO CLEVER MEN

One day, a youth dug out a basket of *keturi* (wild turmeric which resembles ginger) and planned to sell it in the market by saying it to be the edible 'ginger'. Likewise, on the same day, another youth planned to sell out seeds of *bhumoloti* (which resemble black pepper) saying them to be 'black-pepper'. Carrying their respective baskets, both left for the market. On the



On the way to the market, the two men confronted each other.

way, the two confronted each other. Which conversing, they came to know about the items they brought for sale. The 'pepper'-seller said to the seller of 'ginger', "Do you know, this season my garden was abounded with black-pepper. I have brought this basket today. I want to sell it in half the price. Afterall, who would like to wait till late noon ?" At his words, the ginger-seller thought, "If I could only exchange my *keturi* with him for his ginger. Thinking so, he called out, "Well, I agree with you. Even in my garden, there was an abundance of ginger. As such, I have brought a load of them. I shall be relieved if I am able to sell them soon. Instead of waiting till noon for the expected price, I would rather sell it off as soon as I can and return home." On hearing him the seller of black-pepper thought, "It wouldn't be bad if I could hand over this basket of *bhumoloti* to him and have his load of ginger for myself." Thinking so, he said, "There is no ginger in my house. I need some of them." In response, the ginger-seller said, "Even I don't have black-pepper in my house. I am thinking of taking enough of it."

After this conversation, the pepper-seller said, "Well, if you are willing to sell the ginger at half the price, I would also like to do the same with my pepper. In that case, why don't we exchange our stuff?" On hearing this, the ginger-seller said in excitement, "That would be nice, lets do so." So saying, the ginger - seller took the basket of 'pepper' and the pepper-seller had that of 'ginger'. Then they left in opposite directions. When the two were out of sight of each other, they fled like shooting stars.

Each of the two were happy on being able to 'cheat' the other. But, on examining the contents of the baskets, they discovered that they were both cheated. Several days after this incident, suddenly they met each other in the same market. The pepper-dealer asked the dealer of ginger, "Hello, how did you like the pepper that day ?"

After a brief conversation, they praised each other and said, "Let's enter into a partnership; let's be friends." Saying this, they became friends and went to a place where they planned to amass wealth by cheating others. They reached the house of a Brahmin. When they told him that they had come in search of work, the Brahmin appointed them as servants in his house. He made the pepper-seller to look after his cow and made the ginger-seller water his *tulsi* (an aromatic plant sacred to the Hindus).

The Brahmin's cow was very spirited and uncontrollable. The pepper-seller couldn't leave her even for a moment. No sooner had he set her free, then she would enter into other people's gardens and start eating vegetables and grains. Even the tulsi-plant was so troublesome that however much it was watered, the water dried up immediately, being soaked by the soil. Both became weary of their respective jobs. They couldn't rest even for a while. As such, both of them thought of cheating the other by exchanging their jobs. With that idea in mind, one day the cowherd said to the water-carrier, "Friend, how is your work ? I am finding mine quite fine. I drive the cow to the forest and sleep under the shade of a tree the whole day. In the evening, I just bring the cow back and tie her in the cowshed." Hearing him, the water-carrier said, "There is nothing much to say about my work. During the day, I water the plant with one or two pots of water. After that, I am free to sit or sleep as I choose." On hearing each other, the cowherd wished to carry water while the water-carrier wanted the job of the cowherd. The next day, they exchanged their respective jobs. In the evening, when they met each other, the cowherd asked the carrier of water, "Friend, how did you find the work ?" He answered, "Just as you found." After they lauded each other, they wanted to dig up the tulsi-plant in order to see where the water disappeared. At night, when the Brahmin had gone to sleep, they dug up the tulsi-plant with a spade and saw a large pit underneath, the depth of which would be about ten feet. The pepper-seller went down and saw several pots of silver at its bottom. He quickly climbed out of the pit and told the other about it. At this, they made two large bags out of their shawls. The ginger-seller said to the seller of pepper, "You take a bag and go down into the pit. Fill the bag with silver and lift it over the pit. Next, I will throw down the other bag too and you do like-wise". For the first-time, the pepper-seller did accordingly. Then he thought that if the ginger-seller gets the other bag of silver too, he might run away with the bags and bury him before he could climb out of the pit. As such, he filled only a small amount of silver and entered into the bag himself. Then he called out, "Pull out this bag. It's very heavy. I can't do it single-handedly." On hearing this, the ginger-seller pulled up the bag



The ginger-seller pulled the bags from the pit.

instantly and did what the pepper - seller apprehended. Thinking that he was burying the pepper-seller, the seller of ginger hurriedly filled up the pit with soil. Then he tied the bags to a pole and left for home. The load was very heavy. As such, on his way, he sat under a tree in order to take rest. Hard labour made him feel thirsty. So, leaving the load there, he went to a nearby pond to quench his thirst. As soon as he went down to the pond, his friend came out of the bag and ran away with the load instantly. When the other friend returned, he found that the bags were not there. It was then that he realized that his friend had cheated him with his cunning and tact. He went home feeling sad for not being able to know that he was carrying his foe in one of the two bags.

After many days, the two 'friends' met again. The pepper-

seller said, "Friend, you gave me a nice burial in that pit." The other one replied, "You took all my silver and even had a ride on my shoulder." After this chat, it didn't take much time for them to be fast friends again. However, the ginger - seller was not yet happy as, the pepper-seller had a nice ride on his shoulder. A few days later, the ginger-seller made a plan and told his wife, "I will lie on my bed. You cover my face and body with a piece of cloth and start crying as if I am dead. Send a message through a person to my friend saying that I am no more. When he arrives, tell him it was my last wish that none but he should lift my body to the cremation- ground." His wife did accordingly. But the shrewd pepper-seller understood that the news was not true. He shed false tears and said to his friend's wife, "My friend's death has created a void in our lives. Why do we need this house, this property ? The sight of these would afflict us with sorrow as we would be constantly reminded of him." Saying this, he made a false show of grief by striking on his chest. Then he took a machete and entered the garden. He cut all the useful plants, trees and other crops and devastated the place. Next, he came near his 'dead' friend and said to his wife, "I cannot lift my friend all alone. As such, I shall have to cut his body into two and carry the parts one by one to the crematory." Saying this, he shook his machete and pretended to strike at his friend's body, when the ginger-seller sat up at once and both of them began to laugh to their hearts' content. The ginger-seller said, "It's enough, my friend. I couldn't climb on your shoulder. Instead I have lost the plants in my garden. You are cleverer than I am."

Meanings :-

keturi : wild turmeric which looks like ginger.

bhumoloti : a kind of wild seed which resembles black-pepper.

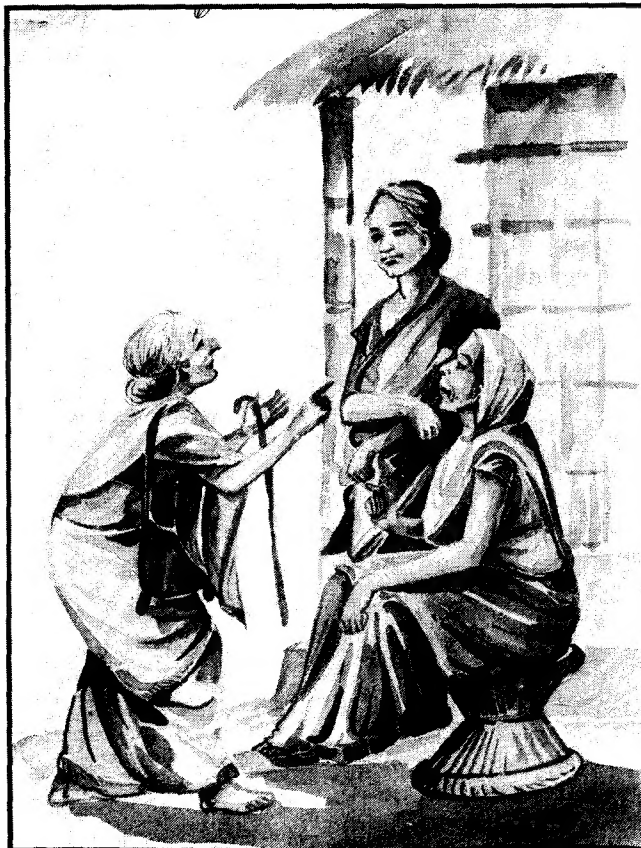
Brahmin : a man of the first and the highest caste among the Hindus.

tulsi : The holy or sacred basil (ocimum sanctum).

KANCHANEE

An old man had seven sons. He could not see them prosper as he died before they were able to earn their livelihood. The old woman enjoyed some satisfaction, but she too died soon after six of them were married except the youngest. But all of them continued to live together in harmony. Among them, the youngest son was the most handsome and he was amiable in his manners. Therefore, he was loved by his elder brothers. Instead of entrusting their respective wives with the charge of their property, the clever youngest brother was asked to take charge by them. As such, the wives of the elder brothers hated him from their heart of hearts. Although they were not fond of him, they didn't dare to pester him for anything in fear of their husbands.

One day, an old beggar-woman came to their house asking for alms.



One day, an old beggar-woman came asking for alms.

At that time, the youngest brother was not at home. So, they said, "Well, the youngest brother has gone out. How can we give you alms unless he comes back ? We cannot do so. He is the owner of everything." At this, the old woman said, "What ? How could a male person become the owner when you all were there ? I have never seen or heard such a thing." They said to her, "Look, even if it is unseen and unheard of for you, we don't even own a trifle. The elder brothers have entrusted him with the charge of all property." It didn't take time for the old woman to understand their feelings. She said, "Foolish women, how dull you are ! Why don't you all disown him and take his place ?" They asked, "How can we disown him ?" The woman said, "If you listen to my plan, you can do that even today." Hearing her, the women drew near the old woman. When they asked her for the means, she got up and brought a thorn and chanted magic words over it. Then she handed it over to them and said, "When your husbands' youngest brother returns today, bring him near and tell him to sit under the pretext of trimming his hair. While arranging his hair, you pierce this thorn tacfully into his ear-lobe and tell him to turn into a 'dog'. In no time, he would become a dog and go away. Then you all can take up charge of the property and live happily." Saying this, she left. When their husbands' youngest brother came home, they did as they were advised by the old woman. He turned into a dog and left home in sorrow. In the evening, when the elder brothers returned home, they enquired about their youngest brother. The wives pretended to be ignorant about his whereabouts. The brothers searched for him untiringly but in vain. They felt very sad and worried.

The 'dog' (i.e., the youngest brother) wandered aimlessly and finally arrived in a town. There lived a couple who had no children nor any relatives. The husband went out in search of work every morning and, the wife busied herself with weaving and other domestic chores. The 'dog' approached their house and the woman gave it food to eat and let it lie under the loom. Being treated with love and care, the 'dog' was content to live there.

The woman used to weave daily and the 'dog' lay near her. One day, the shuttle fell from her hand. She looked towards the 'dog' and said jokingly, "Can't you pick up my shuttle ? It keeps falling so often. How am I to bend and pick up again and again ? Pick up the shuttle for me. If I ever beget a daughter, I will marry her to you." At her words, the 'dog' picked up the shuttle instantly. Amazed, the woman thought, "This one is no ordinary dog. He is, infact, superior to a human-being. How could he understand my words ? I have no daughter;



At her words, the 'dog' picked up the shuttle instantly.

even if I had one, it wouldn't have been wrong to get her married to this dog."

Some time after this incident, the woman gave birth to a daughter. The father of the baby named her *Kanchanee*. As days rolled on, she grew into a beautiful maiden and was endowed with charming qualities. The 'dog' too endeared himself to the owners with his virtues. When the time of Kanchanee's marriage drew near, one day, the woman narrated to her husband about the incident of the shuttle. She said, "I told the dog that if ever I have a daughter, I would give her in marriage to him. That might be the reason that I begot a daughter for it seemed impossible for me to have a child. As such, I wish to keep my word

by marrying my daughter to him. What do you say?" The husband was a simple and virtuous man. He replied, "If you had said so to him, you must stand by your word: or else, you would commit a sin. To speak the truth, we had never seen such a dog before. In quality, he surpasses even human-beings. So, I think that our Kanchanee should be married to him." Saying so, the father called his daughter and told her about it. She said, "It's my duty to do according to your wish. As mother promised to marry me to the dog, it should be kept." The parents were pleased to hear what their daughter said. She was married to the 'dog' and both were accommodated in their home and kept with love and care.

Kanchanee took care of the 'dog' whom she had accepted as her 'husband' and served him with devotion. She never regretted for her fate. Though she bathed the 'dog' and cleaned him, sometimes it would go and make itself dirty by rolling over the ground. One day, Kanchanee's mother said to her, "Well dear, just look at your husband. His body has become dirty with dust. Take him to the river to give him a clean bath." Accordingly, Kanchanee took her 'husband' to the river and bathed him. While she was scrubbing all over his body, her hand touched his ear. Finding a part of his ear rough to her touch, she looked at it with care. She found a thorn pricked in there. No sooner had she pulled it out than the 'dog' transformed into a handsome youth whose complexion was like that of raw gold. At this, Kanchanee's joy knew no bounds. When her husband told everything in detail, she said, "If I take you home in this form, my parents and our neighbours would think that I have killed the dog and have associated myself with some other young man. No one would trust me even if I tell them the truth. As such, let me thrust the thorn into your ear and take you home as a 'dog' as before. On reaching home, I shall oil your body in presence of everybody. In the process, I will pull out the thorn and you will turn into a man. Then no one can say anything." Saying this to her husband, she pushed the thorn into his ear-lobe. He turned into a dog and they went home. On reaching home, Kanchanee said to her mother, "Mother, I have washed him. Shall I rub a few drops of oil on him?" The mother told her to do so. Kanchanee brought oil and under the pretext of rubbing oil, she showed her mother the thorn in his ear. The mother said, "It might have got in as he is used to sleep anywhere. Pull out the thorn." As her mother said so, Kanchanee pulled out the thorn. In an instant, the dog transformed into a handsome young man. On seeing this, the parents and the neighbours were amazed and enquired about the

issue. He told them everything in detail. All were wonder-struck but happy. Kanchanee and her parents were greatly elated and they lived happily along with the son-in-law.

The news that a 'dog' had transformed into a 'man' spread like wild fire. When the king came to know about it, he called Kanchanee's husband to his palace. As the king enquired about the incident, he told him everything. The king was pleased and gave him the charge of the Royal-stable.

It spread among the people that the wife of the man who was in charge of the stable was very virtuous and an extremely beautiful woman. Even the king heard of it. He thought that such a woman was fit only for a king. So, he decided to make her his queen. With such an intention, the king said to the in-charge of the stable to send his wife to the king's inner apartment. He did not agree to that. As the king failed to win over him, he imprisoned him. After putting the husband in prison, the king went to his wife Kanchanee to ask her to be his queen. But she vehemently refused. Being unsuccessful in his endeavour, the king returned and thought that till her husband was alive, Kanchanee would never agree to be his queen. As such, in order to pave his way, he decided to kill her husband. Therefore, the king ordered Kanchanee's husband to be put to the stake.

Kanchanee's husband was impaled in front of the king's court. But being totally ignorant about it, Kanchanee was busy weaving. At about that time, a crow which had reddened its beak with the blood of her impaled husband came and perched near Kanchanee and called out—

"Kanchanee! Kanchanee! Don't weave Kanchanee !

Leave weaving for the time.

The king has put one to a stake.

Come to see that."

When Kanchanee looked at the crow, she saw its beak red with blood. She asked it –

"Crow, crow, degraded crow,
what did you eat to colour your beak?"

The crow answered ----

"Kanchanee dear, I am a crow of low caste,
I didn't eat anything to colour my beak.
Your husband is impaled in front of the court,

I have smeared my beak with his blood."

No sooner had Kanchanee heard this, then she left weaving and went inside the house. She marked her forehead with vermilion, wore ornaments and dressed herself in a nice set of apparel. Then she rushed through the paddy-field toward the king's court. On the other hand, while the public-executioner was impaling Kanchanee's husband from below, he saw her rush in his direction. He wailed out to her ----

"Do not come through the paddy-field,
the leaves of paddy will scratch your skin.
Whatever distress happens to me; let it happen,



Kanchanee rushed through the paddy-field towards the king's court.

you go back home."

Hearing this, Kanchanee replied -----

"Let the leaves of paddy scratch my skin,

I don't care.

I shall burn myself on your funeral pyre,

I shall end this miserable life."

Saying this, Kanchanee approached near her husband. She bowed to him by prostrating before him. Then, alongwith her husband, she too put her head into the stake. No one dared to refrain her. After sometime, both the souls left for heaven.

The news of their death came as a bolt from the blue and the king cried in grief -----

"If I knew that Kanchanee intended

to leave this world,

I would have given a score of servants

alongwith her.

If I knew that Kanchanee intended

to leave this world,

I would have sent her in a chariot.

If I knew that Kanchanee intended to

leave this world,

I would not have impaled her husband."

When his sorrow abated to some extent, the king ordered his minister to cremate Kanchanee and her husband on the river-bank. He said, "Cremate the two on the opposite banks of the river. Prepare the burning-pyre of Kanchanee with sandalwood, fragrant timber, incense and ghee. But the one for her husband with remnants of wood and dried leaves.

The minister did accordingly. The two pyres blazed with fire. In the meantime, it was seen that the flames of fire rose from each of the two pyres on the opposite banks. The flames from both the pyres rose higher and higher, then twisted in the middle of the river and united into one. All were amazed to see the union of the flames. The king was also surprised when his minister informed him about the phenomenon. At this, he ordered to plant two trees ---- one in each of the two cremation grounds. A peepal tree was ordered to be planted

in the funeral place of Kanchanee and a banyan in that of her husband.

After a lapse of time, it was seen that, as both the trees grew, they



All were amazed to see the union of the flames.

bent over the river and joined in the middle of it to thrive as one.

Meanings :

Kanchanee : (pronounced 'Kansonee' in Assamese) gold-like.
[*kanchan* (*kanson*): gold, a kind of flower.]
